PHILOSOPHICAL THEORY AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE: PERSONALISED, OBJECT-BASED LEARNING IN PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES AND THE METHODS AND PRACTICES OF ACQUIRING AND DEVELOPING CORE CRITICAL SKILLS.

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Abstract

'The Project' is an innovative learning methodology which develops students' reflective self-awareness of the core, critical skills of philosophical thought. It is a personalised, object-centered research project that beds philosophical concepts into real debates and actual objects and simultaneously demonstrates the relevance and value of philosophical thought beyond the walls of academia. The intention of the mini-project is to research three principal questions: (1) is the Project more appropriate to the development of core critical skills than traditional programmes? (2) Are students actually aware of the benefits of personalised learning? And (3) are students aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy?

§1| Introduction

Bedding philosophy in reality

Among ethicists and teachers of ethical theory it is, to be overtly rhetorical and a little bit disingenuous, implicitly acknowledged that the role of applied ethics and bioethics is of more use in teaching the central doctrines of moral thought than in the actual resolution of issues in contemporary culture, at least as it is practised in most cases.[1] The reasons why applied ethics – discussions of euthanasia, abortion and war, for example – serve this purpose are, for the most part, obvious: the learner feels that there is something at stake, that there is something worth arguing about in a way that they do not when engaging with, say, the veridical versus dispositional theories of pleasure. Central to the degree programme in Philosophical Studies at Newcastle University is an object-centred research programme (hereafter referred to as 'the Project'), personally directed and partly self-assessed by the student which seeks to bed philosophical concepts into real debates and the actual world. Over and above the traditional content and substance of a philosophy degree, learners who engage in an object-centred research project will acquire knowledge that crosses disciplines and takes them beyond their standard, narrow curriculum. Reciprocally, it brings philosophical concepts and skills closer to the non-academic world in much the same way that bioethics has centred many ethical debates through their application of philosophical concepts to real, scientific facts, such as the sentience of animals, the development of embryos or the welfare of peoples.

For example, engaging in a project centred on the object of the 'home' within the territory of 'architecture as a cultural phenomenon' would not only furnish deeper understanding of the specific philosophical concepts brought to bear (possibly, 'space', 'family' and 'tradition') and the conceptual exposition in appropriate thinkers (Kant, Hegel and MacIntyre for example), but also lead to an acquisition of knowledge about architecture and cultural practices. Such knowledge outcomes will be set by the learner himself or herself in collaboration with the supervisor and stated in both the personal development plan and the project dissertation.[2] The learning objectives, knowledge outcomes and educational rationale of the project module are that students be reflectively aware of and able to apply the core critical skills of philosophy to an empirical, non-philosophical object as well as preparing students to have the confidence to use relevant philosophical concepts and knowledge beyond the academic confines of a degree programme.

Over and above the demonstration to students of the relevance of philosophical theory to the real world, there are two other main advantages in the learning approach of the Project. First, the students' motivation to engage in learning is interest rather than punitively driven. If the student has a stake in he outcome and conclusions of his or her thesis because it is grounded in an object that is of interest to

[1] I repeat that this opening salvo is merely rhetorical. As a statement it ought to be made conditional to the teaching of applied ethics as a module part of a programme in philosophy and not as embedded in more vocational or professionally accredited degrees (engineering, biology, medicine) where it serves quite a different purpose. See Myser (2001) for a more rounded discussion.

[2] The terms of art used in object-centred learning will be explained in greater detail in the succeeding chapters, but I also include a glossary of terms in appendix A.

that student, then they are more likely to be motivated to carry out the personal and isolated research necessary for such an endeavour. To be conjectural, one could assume that the reason why is not dissimilar to Aristotle's critique of Plato's argument for common property. If one owns something or sees it as one's own, one is more likely to look after it and care for it. And remember that the thinkers' point of disagreement specifically centred on the ownership and education of children. (Plato, 1955: 462b-c; Aristotle, 1996: 1263a) Second, the Project commits students to a very real engagement between disciplines and hence meets the desirable goal of interdisciplinary education. (UNESCO, 2007: 114) The object of a student's investigation takes him or her outside the comfort of the subject matter of philosophy and requires proper and rigorous research in a separate domain of knowledge (be it archaeology, history, musicology and so on) before reconciling the two in an interesting philosophical manner.

There is ample evidence to suggest that Philosophical Studies' students are more than satisfied with their degree programme (Philosophical Studies topped 'The Teaching on my Course' section of the NSS at Newcastle University in 2006-7 and in 2007-8 students rated both the student experience and the teaching on the course extremely highly with 100% of them satisfied with the programme overall), but the purpose of the present report is to explore whether the actual experience of undertaking the Project is fulfilling its goals and how this can be improved. The changing nature of the job market entails that the vast majority of graduates are no longer either specialist possessors of knowledge or skilled craftsmen, rather most employers require graduates with core critical skills and also the ability to bring knowledge from their degree programme to bear upon seemingly alien domains of knowledge. The Project is a methodology aimed at developing the core critical skills demanded by such roles: independence, autonomy, critical thinking, reflective understanding, evaluative interpretative skills, ability to understand, organise, order and disseminate specialist knowledge (oral, verbal and new media communication skills).[3] These core skills are all traditionally academic skills, but students have often been only latently aware of their talents. The reflective nature of the learning process of the Project is aimed at increasing awareness of these skills through the application of philosophical theory to empirical objects. The question remains how aware students on the programme are of the innovative nature and objectives of the project methodology.

Originally, the main research questions motivating the investigation into the Project were:

1. Is personalised learning more appropriate to the development of core critical skills than traditional programmes?
2. Are students actually aware of the benefits of personalised learning?
3. Is the project methodology peculiarly suited to core philosophical theory modules or can it be easily transferred to other disciplines?

[3] A more rigorous discussion of the core critical skills of a philosophy degree can be found in chapter 2 below.

However, during the early part of the research a clearer and more direct framework presented itself and the last of these questions was replaced by a different one. Question 3 still deserves an answer, but the present research is unable to supply it at the moment.

Reorientation of research: a new question

There is implicit in the forgoing discussion an assumption that ought to be challenged. The overarching aim of this research is seemingly to show that a philosophy degree, its content and its methods are *useful* or *have utility* outside the academic environment and, hence, reading for a degree in philosophy is worthwhile. This does, of course, reduce the value of education to a means-end one and make it purely a functional practice. Its function here is to develop those skills and knowledge useful in one's future life. This is, of course, consistent with the aims and purposes of a learning society as set out by the Dearing report. However, if those aims and purposes are listed in full, then it becomes clear that such a stance is only partial:

- To inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout life, so that they grow intellectually, are well equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment;
- To increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their application to the benefit of the economy and society;
- To serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy at local, regional and national levels;
- To play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society. (NCIHE, 1987: ¶23)

It would idealistic at the extreme to suggest that this is not at least part of the aims of education, it ought however to be countenanced that it is not the be all and end all of education. Education is more than probably one of those goods which Aristotle identified as a good-for-something else but simultaneously a good-in-itself. The Project methodology attempts to meet the dual requirements as set out by the Dearing Report to learn knowledge both for its own sake and for its value in other contexts ('to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their application to the benefit of the economy and society'). Conjecturally, there is also perhaps space in the introduction for the unsubstantial claim that a philosophical education aimed at engagement with the world about us meets other requirements for Higher Education by the Dearing Report ('to inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout life…', 'to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy…'), although that cannot be substantiated in the following pages.

The reorientation of the current research arose from a slight disquiet that the present report would repeat the contemporary ideology that believes that the development of skills in students is most significant and the actual substantial content of disciplines and knowledge is merely a means to an end. By demonstrating the relevance of philosophical concepts outside the academy, the personalised,

object-based approach does not reject the need for skills talk and development, but does so through the medium of philosophical thought and, as such, affirms the discipline itself as worthwhile and relevant to the student and others. The learning methodology must always be based in a standard philosophical curriculum or body of knowledge that furnishes the concepts and methods of proper scientific enquiry (in its broadest sense), and that the Project ought to also ignite in the learner a love of a subject-matter which is at times dry and distant.

It is perhaps odd to use the educational term intellectual capital at a time when, as Hamlet would have put it, the term seems so 'out of joint' with reality. And yet that is perhaps why one finally feels secure enough to use it because it is a term that now has a certain resonance in times when any use of economic concepts even within their own discourse is both inopportune and suspect. Intellectual capital embodies what could be termed the CBI vision of education that sees Higher Education in thrall to the dominant ideology of our time in that its role is to produce skill-possessing possible employees who arrive at the market place with their knowledge to sell.[4] And yet this vision does at least embody a modicum of truth, what Hegel would call shape of spirit, because it does correctly put tension on the vocational/academic binary opposition at the heart of traditional Higher Education. Traditionally, it was believed that whereas a plumber or an electrician learn a craft and a set of practical of skills, an historian or a grammarian learns facts about the world. Yet, such a division of labour was highly suspect: not only does plumbing require 'facts', but history also requires 'skills'. And, in fact, the humanities disciplines which constituted the original academic enterprise of Renaissance Italy develop and perfect those skills demanded by a mercantile, enlightened economy.[5] (Pring, 2004) Only the response of policy makers was to identify and privilege skills over and above, and at the expense of, the substantial content of these disciplines, that is knowledge, as the aim of education as though truth, understanding and conceptualisation were training for something much more worthwhile, that is the transferable skills required for capital accumulation. The skills agenda was identified as the cohesion of Higher Education with a business culture because graduates would be produced which were useful to society as whole through fulfilling a variety of roles in diverse industries.

The Project module in Philosophical Studies is forward-looking because it responds to this cultural context in a radical, innovative and agenda-setting manner in three ways: (1) the personalised, object-based approach is more successful at both developing and making the student aware of specific educational skills (autonomy, independence, critical aptitude, etc.) which are highly desirable and easily transferable; (2) learners do not view the acquisition of knowledge as merely a means to an end (e.g., passing an examination) and, hence, transitory; and finally, (3), the approach is more suited to

[4] If Higher Education produces individuals for the business community, why should companies not pay for their 'own' training programmes? Of course they argue that they do: give us productive individuals, we are productive companies and we pay more tax and this tax is what funds your academies. One more version of the trickle-down myth of capitalism: the sorts of myth which are fast becoming bankrupt. But this myth held fast for a long time and motivated the deconstruction of the academic-vocational opposition that dominated Higher Education until about the last decade of the twentieth century.

[5] The presence of medicine in the universities rather than the polytechnics is historical evidence that the vocational/academic distinction has always been a smokescreen for a deeper ideological division.

contemporary cultural conditions in that it successfully breaks free from outdated binary oppositions, namely the academic versus the vocational and the factual versus the technical which no longer map onto current social and economic reality. The first claim is a response to the skills agenda set by government and policy makers over the past thirty years, whereas the second and third claims are an attempt for the academic community itself to respond to these agendas in a robust and discipline-affirming manner.

(1) The skills agenda identifies intellectual capital as the possession of transferable, core critical skills desirable to would-be employers. It is no longer about epistemic expertise or possession of 'facts'. The object-centred methodology aims at developing the core critical skills which are already implicit to a philosophical education: independence, autonomy, critical thinking, reflective understanding, evaluative interpretative skills, ability to understand, organise, order and disseminate specialist knowledge. (Maguire, 2007; QAA, 2000) These core skills are all traditionally academic skills, but learners have often only been latently aware of their talents. The reflective nature of the learning process of the Project is aimed at increasing awareness of these skills through the application of philosophical theory to empirical objects: one sees these skills in action as it were, rather than implicitly employed as part of the game of philosophy. One can learn to avoid 'begging the question' by attempting to discredit Hobbes's redefinition of liberty, or one can see it in action in statements about media representations of youth, for example. In the second case, the learner must show where he has encountered a case of begging the question and show that it leads to ungrounded argument. The Project is aimed at developing the 'critical being' or rational autonomy of the subject in a reflective rather than an implicit way. (Hanscombe, 2007)

(2) Ask any first-year university student about the content of their A-level syllabus and you will usually be greeted by a shrug of the shoulders. The aim of acquiring the knowledge was to pass the examination as a stepping-stone to a university place. Similarly, students on degrees where the curriculum content is not in any way career specific (philosophy, history, literature, and so on) view the knowledge as something which they are interested in, but that the way to secure employment is through the grading of the degree and not its content. The knowledge disseminated on these programmes is transitory in nature: what is interesting to the individual will remain, but what is necessary for the completion of studies will pass away. Interest to the students is, in part, a function of relevance as indicated by the success of applied ethics in teaching ethical theory.

The proactive response and the discipline affirming nature of the Project module in Philosophical Studies is that knowledge, and its own worth, are also stressed. The object-centred approach allows a discipline (in this case philosophy) to reaffirm the absolute relevance of what may, at times, appear esoteric and (derogatorily) academic learning.

Object-based learning aims to demonstrate the relevance of both philosophical skills and knowledge outwith the academic domain and to also ground philosophical debate in a 'real' territory for students. The ability to bring knowledge from their degree programme to bear upon seemingly alien domains of knowledge is a massive advantage for graduates of the Newcastle Philosophical Studies programme. In

response to the perennial interview question 'How has your degree prepared you for a career in this sector?', many of our students are able to give a concrete summary of their project research usually geared towards a specific employment niche (education, law, human resources) and the philosophical *knowledge* appropriate to that domain (consequentialism, obligation, virtue ethics), instead of reeling off the coached answer by career advisors, whereby philosophy is said to make a person more analytical and logical, organise data and understand difficult texts, our students. So, for example, one student wanted to pursue a career in nursing after finishing her degree and therefore dedicated her project to the concept of care and the changing role of nurse (from passive tool of the doctor to active defender of patient rights in the face of doctors' esoteric dictates). The knowledge outcomes of a degree programme regain the centre-stage alongside the implicit skill outcomes.

Finally, (3), the skills agenda was motivated by the deconstruction of the academic/vocational opposition and the recognition that an academic education was useful. However, the privileging of the skills agenda over and above – and in some sense separate from – the knowledge outcomes of a degree programme was an erroneous response to the actual reality and our shared contemporary culture. The changing nature of the job market entails that the vast majority of graduates are no longer either specialist possessors of knowledge or skilled craftsmen, but facilitators of knowledge and management systems. Certain other binary oppositions reinforce the idea that knowledge and skills are different in kind and objects of separate enquiry and dissemination: science versus humanities (what about the ethics of scientific research?), the empirical versus the essayist (the need for research to cohere with public opinion, research in the size of brains for example), and also the independent versus the dependent (learners through a university career are encouraged to move from passive to active and this transition is sought by employers or society as a whole). (Jaros, Deakin-Crick, 2007: 429)

The exact historical moment and its manifold causes of this deconstruction are incidental: the knowledgeable were always needed as an access point when memory of facts was an internal, oral, hereditary tradition or when the populace as a whole could not read, but contemporary culture has made the roles of individuals horizontal rather than hierarchical. Intellectual capital is no longer about epistemic expertise or possession of 'facts' and the correct description of employees in contemporary, post-industrial culture is one of information nodes or elements in a system of code. General Practioners no longer know all the diseases or symptoms, nor are they the only ones who can access the 'canon' of learning, they are flow-chart operators seeking various outcomes (Paracetamol, antibiotics, referral, 'there-there') and disseminators of this information in the appropriate register for their public. Intellectual capital is about knowing how to find, organise and communicate interpretations in the proper discourse and at the correct register. The object-centred module in Philosophical Students produces such individuals, yet simultaneously affirms the concepts and ideas of philosophy as a subject relevant to and central to such organisations and communications of other discourses. Once more, in response to the conditions of contemporary culture, the Project module is a discipline affirming response rather than relegating the knowledge of philosophy to the role of a mere means to the end of skills acquisition. So, the original third question of the research was slowly replaced by the need to validate the foregoing a priori intuitions concerning the learning methodology prior to any consideration

of whether the approach can affirm any other disciplines in an equally vibrant way. The new research question is: 'Are students aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy?'

Aims and outcomes of the research

The present report, then, seeks to answer these three research questions:

1. Is personalised learning more appropriate to the development of core critical skills than traditional programmes?
2. Are students actually aware of the benefits of personalised learning?
3. Are students aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy?

On the basis of these three questions, one can set out quite clearly the aims and outcomes of the current report. The **aims** of the current investigation are:

1. To investigate whether the object-based, personalised approach to learning better develops the core critical skills as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies;
2. To determine to what extent the object-based, personalised approach to learning makes students aware of the acquisition of the core critical skills as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies;
3. To determine to what extent the object-based, personalised approach to learning makes students aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy.

The envisaged intended **outcomes** of the current research are:

1. To develop a methodology for the teaching and learning of object-based learning that can be transferred to other institutions and to produce guidelines and a guidebook including examples of handouts;
2. To ensure that students see the worth of their degree programme in terms of skill acquisition and can communicate this to others with the aid of concrete examples;
3. To ensure that students see the worth of the epistemic content of their degree programme and can communicate this to others with little or no background in philosophy.

The structure of the report

The following report is split into chapters that will hopefully shed some light and support the foregoing rather open-ended introduction. The next chapter considers the skills developed and the knowledge acquired by a standard philosophical education in order to have a framework in place to make the comparisons set out in the above aims of the research. Following that, there will be a detailed description of the teaching and assessment methodology of the object-based, personalised approach to

learning in philosophy and a supplemental chapter which looks at one rather complex aspect of the pedagogical approach: the choice of methodology. The report will then begin the rather odious task of trying to justify some of the claims made in this introduction and to do so through empirical investigation. The nature of this empirical investigation is explained in chapter five and the data analysed in chapter six. Finally, the conclusion will evaluate the achievements and failures of the research as a whole and set out a possible future programme of development.

§2| The Discipline of Philosophy: skills developed and knowledge acquired

Introduction

The stated aims of the current research are:

1. To investigate whether the object-based, personalised approach to learning better develops the core critical skills as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies;

2. To determine to what extent the object-based, personalised approach to learning makes students aware of the acquisition of the core critical skills as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies;

3. To determine to what extent the object-based, personalised approach to learning makes students aware of the acquisition of the core critical skills as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies.

As such, the investigation is concerned with both the skills developed and the knowledge acquired on a philosophy degree programme. At Newcastle University, one-third of the curriculum is devoted to core modules in philosophical thought, one-third to optional modules including special subjects in philosophy (as well as the option to enrol on modules outside the Philosophical Studies centre in, say, politics, music, history, and science options if pre-requisites are met). In order for a comparison to be made between the programme at Newcastle and other more traditional pedagogical approaches, it is necessary to explicitly state those skills which are deemed desirable by employers and also to outline the foundational knowledge acquired on a standard philosophy degree.

Skills developed on a philosophy degree

According to the Prospects website, philosophy students can expect to develop: '… the ability to: analyse and construct sound arguments; think logically and critically about ideas and issues; distinguish fine differences between views and find common ground; present ideas convincingly through well-constructed, systematic arguments; write clearly and persuasively; generate ideas and come up with solutions to problems; be open to new ideas and new ways of thinking.' (Maguire, 2007) Unfortunately, the description of these skills is simultaneously generic and lazy in that it does not distinctly separate exactly what is desirable in a philosophy student for an employer over and above a standard humanities degree (except perhaps the rather half-hearted attempted to frame the importance of logic and reason). A more rhetorical celebration of philosophical skills can be found in the UNESCO report on philosophical education which holds that:

> Philosophy actually implies exercising freedom in and through reflection because it is a matter of making rational judgements and not just exercising opinions, because it is a matter of not just knowing, but understanding the meaning and principles of

> knowing, because it is a matter of developing a critical mind, rampart par excellence against all forms of doctrinaire passion. (UNESCO, 2007: ix)

Although, later in the report, a more sober description is offered: '… a philosophical education can stimulate the development of a permanent capacity for questioning and critical thinking with respect to the various types of knowledge and intersubjective dynamics governing contemporary society.' (UNESCO, 2007: 113) The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAAHE), in its benchmarking of the discipline of philosophy (2000), gives us a more exhaustive list from which I list those I assume are most easily transferable to other domains and of most interest to non-philosopher employers:

1. Articulacy in identifying underlying issues in all kinds of debate.
2. Precision of thought and expression in the analysis and formulation of complex and controversial problems.
3. Sensitivity in interpretation of texts drawn from a variety of ages and/or traditions.
4. Clarity and rigour in the critical assessment of arguments presented in such texts.
5. Ability to abstract, analyse and construct sound arguments and to identify logical fallacies.
6. Ability to recognise methodological errors, rhetorical devices, unexamined conventional wisdom, unnoticed assumptions, vagueness and superficiality.
7. Ability to move between generalisation and appropriately detailed discussion, inventing or discovering examples to support or challenge a position, and distinguishing relevant and irrelevant considerations.
8. Ability to consider unfamiliar ideas and ways of thinking, and to examine critically pre-suppositions and methods within the discipline itself.
9. Willingness to evaluate opposing arguments, to formulate and consider the best arguments for different views and to identify the weakest elements of the most persuasive view.
10. Honesty in recognising the force of the conclusions warranted by a careful assessment of pertinent arguments.
11. Ability to think creatively, self-critically and independently.
12. Learn to be flexible and develop an adaptable mind able to face new situations.[6]

Most interestingly, is the claim in point 25 that students will develop a 'breadth of view' which is the dual ability to '… cross traditional subject boundaries, examining the limitations and virtues of other disciplines and practices, and recognising philosophical doctrines in unfamiliar places' and '… apply philosophical skills and techniques to issues arising outside the academy.' (QAAHE, 2000) The UNECSO report also expresses a felt need for philosophy, as a discipline, to engage with the complexity of the cultural conditions of late modernity and engage with other disciplines head on rather than remain in isolation and that requires the production of well-rounded, articulate and open-minded graduates. (UNESCO, 2007: 113-116) These are, of course, the very subject matter of the current research and the foundation underlying the claim that the object-based, personalised learning is better suited to develop

[6] The full list can be seen in points 23 through to 27 of QAAHE (2000: 3-4). I have edited the generic humanities skills set and also changed a little of the wording merely for grammatical convention.

these specific skills. (Jaros & Deakin-Crick, 2007: 425) It is noticeable, though, that there is no mention of the utility of philosophical concepts and knowledge outside the academic environment, something which, as the research progressed, became more and more significant.

For the purpose of this investigation, it might well be worthwhile to adopt a virtue approach to this skill set to avoid unnecessary overlap. By describing not the atomistic attributes themselves but rather the ideal agent who has engaged with and developed out of a philosophy programme, we might be better able to gauge the success of these degrees in reaching their objectives and also to compare them with the object-based approach adopted at Newcastle University. So, an employer would hope that a philosophy graduate were able to independently and creatively think through problems, be able to organise and systemise large amounts of data into the significant and non-significant, approach new subject matter methodologically and with confidence, identify key reasons for adopting a specific policy and for rejecting others, be able to identify 'red herring' justifications for a policy and, finally, be capable of presenting and disseminating significant information, conclusions and key justifications for conclusions in a variety of formats and media. We can, then, list those virtues (in groups) ideally exhibited by a philosophy graduate; he or she would be:

- Articulate, precise and comprehensive (from 1,2, 4 and 7)
- Rational, logical, analytical and critical (from 2, 4 and 5)
- Careful, rigorous and patient (from 6 and 9)
- Reflective and self-critical (from 6, 10 and 11)
- Open, tolerant and flexible (from 8, 9, 10 and 12)
- Creative (from 11)
- Independent and autonomous (from 11)

So, what are, from the pedagogical point of view, the core skills developed by a student who reads philosophy? It now seems we can summarise the skills desirable to employers and useful to the learner's own future plans as:

- Articulacy
- Rationality
- Rigorousness
- Critical reflectivity
- Flexibility
- Creativity
- Independence

Knowledge acquired on a philosophy degree

Employers, the experts tell us, are interested in the skills developed by a philosophy student exemplified by those discussed and listed above. However, many of these skills are generic humanities skills and are also only latently (with the exception perhaps of logic) imparted via the curriculum. For the most part, learners will be concerned with the assimilation and memorisation of 'factual' knowledge. One claim

made implicitly in these pages is that such knowledge should not be viewed by employers as a means to an end for developing generic, transferable skills, but that the concepts and ideas learnt on a philosophy degree are themselves useful in the world beyond the university. The nature of contemporary culture, its characterisation as a knowledge economy, the ethical issues raised by – on the grand scale – scientific progress and – on the small scale – employment legislation all overtly involve the mastering of philosophical concepts. The content of a philosophical degree should not be left at the exit door on the day of graduation and to engender this understanding in the student requires 'contextual understanding' or the ability to answer the question 'Why does philosophy matter?' The object-based approach to learning makes such a claim stark to our students and meets the criterion to validate their contextual understanding. Hanscombe offers a question to gauge the level of this in students' awareness: 'Perhaps a good measure of contextual understanding is a student's ability to explain the meaning and purpose of their discipline (or parts of it) to a lay person.' (2008: 163)

A philosophy student in the United Kingdom, at any given institution, would expect to be familiar with the concepts of person, mind, free-will, God, right, deontology, utilitarianism, duty, reality, knowledge, beauty, art, determinism, value, logic, critical thought and rational argument, notwithstanding distinctions between traditions taught (analytic or continental) or methodological approach (problem-based versus historical). According once more to the benchmark for philosophy (QAAHE, 2000: 2-3), standard curriculum would include (amongst other studies):

- Knowledge of central texts and ideas of specific, historical philosophers,
- Some central theories and arguments in the fields of Logic, Metaphysics, Epistemology, or Philosophy of Mind, broadly understood,
- Some central theories and arguments in the fields of Moral, Political, or Social Philosophy, broadly understood,
- Awareness of major issues currently at the frontiers of philosophical debate and research.

The question is, then, how would such concepts and knowledge be of any use outside the confines of the subject itself. To reiterate in an illustrative style: discussions of the concepts of free-will and coercion could be brought to bear on employer-employee relations within the domain of human resources, the nature of identity and its relationship to familial structures could be useful to managing individuals' education, and the notion of space could help in arranging an art gallery. Hopefully, the achieved outcomes of the current research can illuminate this thought.

Knowledge outcomes of the personalised, object-centred research

Over and above the traditional content and substance of a philosophy degree, learners who engage in an object-centred research project will, of course, acquire knowledge that crosses disciplines and takes them beyond their standard, narrow curriculum. So, for example, engaging in a project centred on the object of the 'home' within the territory of 'architecture as a cultural phenomenon' would not only furnish deeper understanding of the specific philosophical concepts brought to bear (possibly, 'space', 'family' and 'tradition'), but also lead to an acquisition of knowledge about architecture and cultural practices. Such knowledge outcomes will be set by the learner in collaboration with the supervisor and

stated in both the personal development plan and the project dissertation. The learner would gauge his or her success in attaining these knowledge outcomes.

§3| Teaching and Assessment Methodology of the Project Module

Introduction: the learning objectives

Probably the most sensible way to begin the discussion is to state the learning objectives for the personalised, object-based research project. As set out in the Module Outline Form for the Project modules in Philosophical Studies at Newcastle University, the intended knowledge outcomes are:[7]

> By the end of the module, students will:
>
> - become acquainted with (stage 1); develop a good understanding of (stage 2); develop an advanced understanding of (stage 3) Project methodology as it links empirical and conceptual material;
> - become acquainted with (stage 1); develop an empirical understanding (stage 2); develop an advanced empirical understanding (stage 3) of a chosen territory (an object or place characterised by diverse material exchanges) as it is suitable for exploration through the application of philosophical ideas and knowledge systems;
> - develop an understanding (stage 1); develop a good understanding (stage 2); develop an advanced understanding (stage 3) of the challenges of testing an abstract vocabulary in an empirically defined context.
>
> The movement from acquaintance to understanding to advanced understanding tracks the progress made by students year on year.

The need to be aware of the Project methodology rests on the students' self-awareness of the rationale and significance of their research; in other words, being aware of what they are doing, how they are doing it and why they are doing it. The outcome is reinforced by the development of an understanding of the limits and uses of using philosophy on 'empirical' objects. The middle outcome is straightforward in that engaging in such a Project, the student is broadening his or her knowledge base and engaged in actual interdisciplinary thinking.

The intended skills outcomes of the Project module are:

> By the end of the module, students will:
>
> - develop an (advanced) ability to critically engage with philosophical ideas and knowledge systems as they are brought into contact with an empirically defined object or place;
> - develop an (advanced) ability to process knowledge, organising a diverse body of material such that it becomes amenable to philosophical analysis;
> - develop an (advanced) ability to share the results of their research with other students through the giving of presentations.

[7] See appendix C for the module outline.

Once more, the movement from an ability to an advanced ability tracks the progress made by students from stage 2 to stage 3.

Implicitly in the above description, one finds the core critical skills of a philosophy degree transferred to an alien context and coupled with the knowledge outcome of comprehending the Project methodology. Moreover, students ought to be aware of the utility and desirability of such an enterprise. The third skill outcome makes explicit reference to communication skills and the ability to communicate the worth and value of philosophical analysis to a lay audience.

On this basis, it is possible to describe a set of learning objectives (LO) of the Project module appropriate to the present investigation and coherent with those stated in the module outline and which also incorporates students' self-awareness of the relevance and worth of their research. By the end of the object-based learning module, learners should be:

1. able to apply the core critical skills of philosophy to an empirical object;
2. aware of their possession of core critical skills valued by employers;
3. able to communicate their possession of these skills and their relevance to would-be employers;
4. able to communicate to laypeople the worth and relevance of a degree programme in philosophy;
5. prepared and confident enough to use relevant philosophical concepts and knowledge beyond the academic confines of a degree programme.

And let us also remind ourselves of the list of core critical skills as established earlier: articulacy, rationality, rigorousness, critical reflectivity, flexibility, creativity and independence. The teaching and learning methodology should, then, demonstrate that by the end of the module, the learning outcomes will be met and, most significantly, learners will be in possession of and aware of their possession of the core critical skills.

Assessment policies and regulations

As part of the object-centred research module, students will be required to produce:

a) a progress report (500 words) in January (tutors will supply written feedback);
b) a development plan (the 'workbook') in June in which the student reflects on what they have learnt, develops a personal methodology for their research and becomes aware of the skills required to successfully carry out their intended study. This meets LO 1 and 2;
c) two oral presentations (one in January, one in May) in which learners present a summary form of their research to others in such a way that it is explicable to non-philosophers and gain immediate feedback from peers and tutors in terms of question and answer sessions. This meets LO 3 and 4 and it is stressed to the student that a question often asked at job interviews is 'How was your degree programme relevant to this vacancy?' and that the presentations are excellent preparation for interviews;
d) a small webpage(stages 2 and 3) or a poster (stage 1) summarising their project (in June) to reinforce LO 3 and 4 in a different medium;
e) Production of the actual thesis itself (4000 in stage 1 (20 credit module) and 8000 words in stages 2 and 3 (40 credit module)) in June to be assessed by tutors, second markers and with

samples sent to the External Examiner.

The regulations for the completion of the module are distributed to students at the beginning of each stage in student handbooks, on the web, on the notice board, in specific handouts and orally reinforced in the preliminary project meetings:

- Failure to give the final presentation without a valid excuse will result in a loss of 10 marks from your overall project mark.
- Failure to submit the one page summary of the project for the Book of Change or a poster without a valid excuse will result in a loss of 5 marks from your overall project mark.

Note that in Stage 1, the project is worth 20 credits in total whereas in Stages 2 and 3, the project is worth 40 credits in total.

Teaching and learning methodology

The teaching of the object-based research module takes place in weekly meetings in groups of maximum ten students, reinforced by one-to-one sessions and substantial supervisor feedback. Learners are accompanied, in close collaboration with a supervisor, through phased development consisting of:

1. identifying an object of personal interest appropriate to philosophical reflection;
2. pursuing personal research into the history or understanding of the object within a specific context or discourse and discussing it with peers and tutor ('empirical' research);
3. identifying relevant philosophical concepts from the standard philosophy lecture courses supplied by the department;
4. developing an appropriate method for the application of the concepts to the object (be it historical, conceptual, empirical and so on);
5. reflecting on skills and competences gained and knowledge acquired;
6. agreeing to a provisional dissertation title, readied so that they can be sent on to the External Examiner in the first week of May if requested;
7. the production of a project dissertation detailing the methodology and development of the application of philosophical concepts to the object and the worth of the research as a whole.

The developmental phases

Phase 1: identification of the object

The difficulty or ease of identifying the object of research differs from learner to learner. Some students arrive at the first meeting with very clear cut ideas about what exactly they want to pursue, some arrive with a vague nebulous of interests and some with no ideas whatsoever. The first few weekly meetings of the project group are devoted to the explanation of the project approach (stages 1 and 2) or the discussion of feedback for the project dissertation (stages 2 and 3). It is very important that the learner identifies an object of interest himself or herself, but the supervisor can – with the aid of the project group as a whole – prompt the learner into the proper attitude by asking particular questions ('What actually interests you outside university?', 'What do you think is important that we don't have chance to

discuss in our seminars?') or by drawing the learner's attention to past objects of study (either the online Book of Change or the entries for the Book of Change displayed on the walls of Philosophical Studies). The role of the supervisor is to offer encouragement but also to use his or her experience to direct the learner away from objects that are inappropriate, either because they will not yield any substantial discussion of worth or because they are too ambitious in their scope. As such, the supervisor applies the criteria of scope (is the object too narrow or too broad to discuss in the limits set by an 8000 word dissertation?), engagement (will the student be able to devote the equivalent of 40 credits of active learning to this subject matter without becoming disinterested?) and value (is such a project likely to be worthwhile?). The reflections, evaluations and ideas which arise from the group discussions and individual ruminations should all be listed and reflected upon in the learners' personal development plans.

For illustrative purposes, let us assume that a learner has an interest in looking more closely at illegal drugs and this interest was sparked by a variety of circumstances: why certain substances are illegal and others are not, why there is such a difference in attitudes to different substances (nicotine, alcohol, cannabis) between generations, why contemporary society is seemingly equivocal in its own attitude to illegal substances, and so on. The supervisor sees possibilities in such an exploration and prompts the learner to ask herself whether experiences of drug taking and religious experiences are similar, why people take drugs, why society may want people to use or not use certain substances, why the individual may want to use them, when the substances were made illegal, why we distinguish in kind between substances, and so on.

Handout 1: Introducing personalised object-centred learning. A handout which introduces the learner to the idea of active, personalised learning and gives an illustrative example of the benefits and advantages of such an approach. It also introduces the phased development (the steps) approach outlined here.[8]

Handout 2: Explanation of terms and vocabulary. A version of the glossary so that students do not become discouraged by the use of terms of art and specialist vocabulary, but have a reference for all the terms used.

Phase 2: the choice of the context, territory or place of the object

Once the object has been identified and provisionally approved, the learner must then independently source information and begin compiling data. Such an operation is to be understood as broadly an empirical exercise. The learner must actively, independently and creatively identify possible sources of information and data outwith the normal comfort zone of the library and the internet (although these will, more than probably, be the starting point). Through this process, the way in which the object is to be understood – its context, place and territory – are to be decided. The learner must be encouraged to engage with the 'real' world, much as the prescriptive example of the rise in bioethics has done, with the supervisor reminding them that one of the objectives of the project is to demonstrate to the learner

[8] Examples of all these handouts can be found in appendix B.

– and to give them in turn the ability to demonstrate to others – the relevance and utility of philosophical methods and knowledge outside the degree; to descend from the ivory tower if you will. This requires, to put it colloquially, 'getting one's hands dirty.' Empirical research can be observation based (people's behaviour), qualitatively and quantitatively compiled (gauging people's attitudes through questionnaires), archival (historical documents), interpretative (government documents, media data) and so on. Evidence can include photographs, statistics, archival documents, narratives, media clips and so on. The supervisor must stress the need to treat all these as statements of knowledge about the object and hence propositions to be analysed. As such, they are to be treated as though they were a quotation from a primary or secondary source in a standard essay: first, accurately reconstruct the meaning of the statement; and, secondly, consider whether the meaning has good reasons to be endorsed or there exist reasons to question its supposed authority about the object. All information should be compiled and archived in the Project personal development plan with personal reflections by the student on why such information is listed and why it may be of use in the overall research.

So, to continue our example, a learner may well want to look at the object of drugs in contemporary culture. She seeks information from a variety of sources (the library, government, friends' anecdotes, fictional narratives and so on) until she hits upon a little known fact that there was an attempt to prohibit certain substances to specific classes, especially factory workers. She then makes a connection between productivity and drug use and becomes aware that the paternalist justification for the prohibition of certain substances may well be disingenuous. She asks whether legislation exists to protect the individual or to protect the interests of someone else. She decides (with the help of her supervisor) that what interests her most is the object drugs within the context of legislation and law.[9] The supervisor asks her about the sources for her information and whether it can be trusted (whether it is from a decriminalisation lobby group, for example).

The role of the supervisor is to direct (when needed) the research, to ask questions that reveal the learners' real interest in their object and to facilitate a choice of context that will be worthwhile and substantial. The same criteria apply to the choice of the context as did to the choice of the object. It is also here worthwhile to introduce the learner to the idea of a contrast in order to begin the process of reflection: so the supervisor may wish to direct the learner to see how an immediate understanding may well be problematic. So, for example, the idea of certain substances being prohibited for the immediate reason of protecting the individual from harm, can be theoretically contrasted to other paternalistic laws (seatbelts) and also to other substances which may cause harm (alcohol, nicotine); or, an historical contrast can be developed between the pre and post legislation periods and to see what timeline the legislation coincided with (the Industrial Revolution, the era of mass production of these substances); or a cultural contrast between societies with stricter and those with weaker laws. These contrasts should bring into sharp relief the immediate nature of our everyday statements and judgements and also the supposed rational basis for them. One contrast should be sufficient to begin the reflective process and

[9] So, within the context of ethics, broadly understood. The following chapter on methodology should make this clearer and also explain the necessity for this step.

more than one would put an unnecessary intellectual burden on the learner as well as challenge the world limit of the dissertation.

Normally, this would take learners up until the end of the first semester, although it differs from student to student, and they are required to hand in a progress report (500 words) and present a short oral talk to their peers. Supervisors can take the opportunity to suggest possible concepts and/or a worthwhile contrast/change that the student may want to consider.

Handout 3: Pursuing 'empirical' research. Some guidelines and illustrative examples about how to pursue the research and to highlight the difference between the Project dissertation and a standard philosophy essay.

Handout 4: Critical reflection, change and contrast. A quick description of why the object ought to be contrasted, that is understood in at least two ways (so in stage 1 as an object for the Ancients and an object for the Moderns) to begin to question whose understanding of the object is the right one and demonstrating how this is directly related to a reflective, philosophical attitude. It will also encourage the learner to think about which philosophical concepts would most be appropriate to answering that question.

Phase 3: the identification of appropriate philosophical concepts

Through the narrowing of one's object to a discussion within a specific territory or context, and by empirically researching the 'place' of the object within this context, the appropriate philosophical concepts ought to suggest themselves. In the ongoing example above, the questions posed by the learner can only truly be answered by a detailed exploration of the concepts of law, paternalism, social welfare, autonomy and publicity. All of these concepts are either directly or indirectly discussed on the stage 2 module *Phi2003 Modern Philosophy 1: Ethical Thought*. The learner already has, therefore, the basic readings and understandings of the concepts at hands. The role of the supervisor is to encourage more in depth reading, especially of primary texts, so the learner would be encouraged to read Kant, Bentham and Mill, looking especially at the harm principle and the shared notion of autonomy.

Bibliographies and notes should be assembled in the personal development plan and the understanding of the concepts will be developed and revised in conversation with the supervisor and project group. The supervisor's role is to give guidance and approve the concepts before real research begins.

Handout 5: Progress questionnaire. A self-assessment document that ought to be filled-in and then discussed with the supervisor, covering the first three steps of the object-centred approach and acting as a progress report and measure. It encourages the student to state explicitly his or her object, context, philosophical concepts, thinkers and guiding questions. It also helps to make concrete the direction and aims of the project research and to help learners to find a direction within the vast amounts of information they should have collected.

Phase 4: the selection of an appropriate methodology

The learner will need to explicitly state how they are going to investigate his or her project and also state why the philosophical concepts are appropriate and how they are to be applied. In short, he or she will need to, at least in a rudimentary fashion, state the methodological approach taken towards his or her object of research. Given the technical and sophisticated nature of this operation I have devoted the whole succeeding chapter to this matter. The supervisor's role here is pivotal and intensive.

Handout 6: Choosing an appropriate methodology. Introduces the various methodologies encountered in the philosophy modules and how they might be applied to an object and context.

Phase 5: reflection and self-assessment

When the discussion of the object, context and concepts have reached a high level of theoretical development, the supervisor will begin prompting members of the project group to begin asking themselves whether it was worth undertaking the research they have done, whether they have developed skills or acquired knowledge that will be of use in the future or with relation to their degree as a whole. Learners are encouraged to reflect on their own development by looking back through their personal development plans. The learner should be independent and active by the stage of thesis writing and group meetings should be wholly led and determined by learners' aims and objectives. [10]

Handout 7: Self-assessment of personal development. A questionnaire in which the leaner becomes aware of skills acquired and interest developed and emphasises the reflective nature of the Project.

Phase 6: the project dissertation 1| title and objectives

Learners are reminded of the regulations and of the need to produce a presentation, an entry for the Book of Change (or a poster in stage 1) and the project dissertation. The learner should be independent and active at this stage. The supervisor will ask for two things prior to the completion of the project dissertation: one, a statement of learning objectives that ensures the learner thinks about the relevance of his or her project to others beyond the supervisor and the author; and, two, a provisional title.

Handout 8: Writing objectives and titles. A guide to producing coherent and appropriate objective and intended aims for the project dissertation as well as helping the learner to word a proper title. Reference to past titles will be used. The supervisor's role is to guide and advise.

Phase 7: the project dissertation 2|producing the dissertation, the entry for the Book of Change and the final presentation

The learner will find the personal development plan a massively useful resource for the production of the dissertation. The supervisor and group meetings are to support the writing process, but the learner at this stage should be almost completely independent and active.

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[10] It should be noted the active role of the learning and the reorientation of the teacher-learner relationship in this process. I do not have time to expand this aspect here, but would imagine an interesting discussion could be framed using the deconstruction of the Enlightenment dichotomy of independent/dependent that MacIntyre (1999) operates.

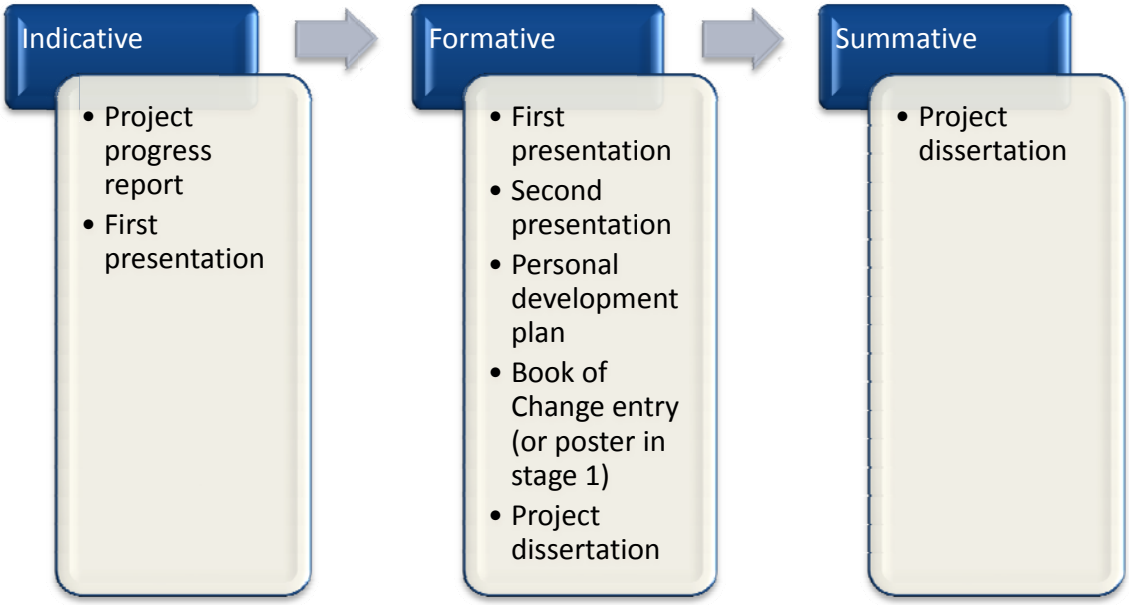
Handout 9: Structure of the dissertation and assessment criteria. A small handout describing the expected content and structure of the dissertation, although learners are encouraged to present their work as they see fit in collaboration with the approval of the supervisor.

Handout 10: Presenting your work orally. Guidelines and hints about giving the final presentation.

Assessment methodology

There are three types of assessment worth distinguishing: indicative, formative and summative. Indicative assessment is a process whereby the learner is assessed with a view to indicating how to improve in such exercises in future. So, for example, a lecturer may choose to pose an indicative essay question and supply feedback solely for the purpose of improving the learner's work in future. Formative assessment is a learning experience itself; so, although a leaner may well be graded in preparing an essay or presenting an oral report, he or she enhances both substantive knowledge and hones core skills through the actual practice itself. Finally summative assessment has no learning value itself, but is used to grade a student's performance in a specific module. The paradigmatic example would be an unseen, multiple choice examination that measures how far the student has met the intended knowledge outcomes of a specific module. Exclusively summative assessment for the personalised, object-centred research module is impossible since it is students themselves who set a large part of the intended knowledge outcomes.

However, the very distinction between formative and summative assessment is perhaps overly dogmatic. There do indeed exist ideal paradigmatic examples of both forms of assessment (a presentation and an unseen logic examination respectively), but whereas the former is undesirable since one's presentation skills are not a direct product of a learning module, so it is unclear exactly what we are assessing; the latter is undesirable since, in the contemporary socio-economic culture, there is no need of 'autodictats' since knowledge is possessed by computers and not minds. There are obvious areas of overlap which the object-centred project module exploits reflected in the assessment policies.



Relationship between assessment policies and learning outcomes

Intended learning Outcome	How assessed?	Who assesses?
1	Project dissertation	Supervisor
2	Personal development plan	Self-assessment
3	Personal development plan	Self-assessment
4	Presentation, entry for Book of Change	Self-assessment
5	Project dissertation, presentation, entry for Book of Change	Supervisor, Self-assessment
Knowledge outcomes: philosophical concepts	Project dissertation	Supervisor
Knowledge outcomes: object and context specific	Project dissertation, personal development plan	Self-assessed

It is clear from the foregoing table that many of the intended learning outcomes are self-assessed and so it should be for personalised learning since, if the learner sets his or her own agenda, then he or she ought to be in a position to evaluate its success or failure. The self-assessment is implicit to discussions in project sessions and also forms the basis of progression from stage 1 to 2 and 2 to 3. The learner benefits from continuous feedback from his or her supervisor and peers within his or her project group.

However, in order to evaluate the object-centred research projects, supervisors must be in a position to grade the final project dissertation. The original aim of the methodological approach was to combine two supervisors, one from Philosophical Studies and a second from a discipline congruent with the object and context of the project dissertation such that a well-rounded assessment could be proffered. However, such an ideal proved to be impractical in the contemporary institutional structure and the demands on staff hours. So, the nature of the grading of the projects rests largely on the use and understanding of the philosophical concepts at the heart of the project dissertation, plus the use of reasoning skills. (LO 1, 5 and intended knowledge outcomes (philosophy))

	Assessment criterion	Intended knowledge outcome	Skill developed	Weighting[11]
1	Depth of understanding of philosophical concepts/thinkers	Philosophy	Rationality	35%
2	Appropriate use/application of philosophical concepts/thinkers	Philosophy	Creativity	30%
3	Appropriate and reflective choice of methodology		Rationality, critical reflectivity	20%
4	Rigour of 'empirical' research	Object-centred knowledge	Rigorousness, independence	5%
5	Evidence/relevance of secondary material (philosophy)	Philosophy	Rigorousness	4%
6	Evidence/relevance of secondary material (object-centred/context)	Object-centred knowledge	Flexibility, independence	2%
7	Awareness of personal development and level of personal engagement		Critical reflectivity	2%
8	Structure, organisation and style		Articulacy	2%

The supervisor, in this case being a lecturer in philosophy, is able to assess expertly the level of philosophical understanding and the sophistication of the reasoning skills being used. The first three (and principal) assessment criteria are well within the expertise and capability of a lecturer in philosophy. The only real problem concerns statements about the object of the research outwith the examiner's specialisation. However, such problems will only arise in relation to criteria 4 and 6, and such assessment consists in evaluating the choices of sources of information and the authenticity of these sources. Such an evaluation will pose little difficulty for any academic. Each criterion will be

[11] These percentages are illustrative and not literal. They are expressed merely to replicate the process of the assessor in approaching the project dissertation.

judged in line with the normal faculty marking criteria: excellent, very good, good, basic, borderline fail, fail.[12]

[12] See appendix D.

§4| Choosing a methodology

Introduction

One crucial element of the object-based approach is an awareness in the learner of methodological commitments. At a certain point in the learning process, he (or she) has to ask how he understands the object before him and whether the way in which it is understood is, in fact, appropriate. The question 'Is x true?' and the related 'What is the nature of truth?' (and, moreover, a whole plethora of correlates 'Is this good?/What is the good?', 'Is this beautiful? What is beauty?', and so on) are, of course, cornerstones of any philosophical curriculum, but the question of the object-based approach is more 'Is what I say about this object true?' It is, therefore, immediately more finite and not a substantive philosophical question. It is a formal or methodological question because the learner's dissertation will seek to offer a collection of knowledge statements about a particular object as a rational evaluation, explanation or description of that object and seek to justify it. Therefore, there is an implicit need to state the foundation of the rationality of statements about these objects. Learners who are able to state their methodology, are also able to shift from a mere description of their object and territory to a reflective analysis of the immediate understanding of the object and how the philosophical concepts allow them to overcome distortions implicit in the immediate understanding of that object.

Understanding of and reflection on methodology is, however, a high level and very sophisticated rational operation. It is not an immediate and intuitive practice and a philosophy degree will seek to develop in a student an implicit practice of logic (in its broadest sense) and critical reasoning over a period of three years. (QAAHE, 2000: 4) In most cases, although the student is trained in the 'Ability to recognise methodological errors, rhetorical devices, unexamined conventional wisdom, unnoticed assumptions, vagueness and superficiality', being able to communicate to others how they perceive or 'see' the rational from the rhetorical and the true from opinion remains far beyond them because such methodological considerations remain controversial even at the postdoctoral research level. (QAAHE, 2000: 3)

So, is such a requirement just too demanding? If the aim of the object-based approach is to make students aware of the worth of reflective, philosophical thinking about everyday objects and objects they will encounter outside the academy and specifically in the workplace, then the ability to demonstrate – even in a rudimentary fashion – an awareness of the need to elaborate a specific way in which to deal with and organise information as well as a justification why that approach and not others is appropriate is central. And such an elaboration need not concern itself with high-level theorising about methodological controversies. When the curator of a museum uses a casual explanation of individuals' behaviour to explain the position of facilities ('Let's place the café at the exit, people will be thirstier.'), or an historical contrastive method ('By placing the items as they would have been originally in the Pompeian homes rather than how we expect them to be in a museum, we see them in their 'natural' light.'), debates about the validity of these methods and their exact nature do not – and should not – arise. But, an ability to articulate why the statements are justified relies on the use of a method

and increases their possible endorsement by others. By considering the choice of method in relation to a non-philosophical object of study, the learner becomes adept at such justifications.

Choice of method

Students of philosophy are introduced to a range of rational methods as par for the course: critical reason, logic, hypothetico-deductive method, induction, linguistic analysis, reflective equilibrium, phenomenology, hermeneutics, deconstruction, structuralism, genealogy and so on. All of these are explicitly linked to substantive theories of truth (positivism, analytic philosophy, idealism) and also to specific domains of philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, ethics), but it is possible to distil from these various traditions (and also based on experience of teaching the personalised, object-based method) constellations of possible methodological approaches. It ought to be stressed that students are not required to choose only one method, nor are they restricted to the approaches listed in the following table (see below), but the motivation for the simplified matrix is to simultaneously show progression from one stage to the next in methodological sophistication as well as making an arduous task somewhat less painful. If a learner wished to use, for example, the pure phenomenological approach to his or her object or even linguistic analysis, then the facilitator would encourage and aid such a commitment, ensuring that the assessment criteria (discussed below) would be met.

However, the choice of method ought also to be directly related to two aspects of the object under consideration: first, the nature of the object; and, second, the empirical part of the research and the sources of information about the object. Both of these aspects are heavily related to the identification of the *territory* or context in which the object is situated. The territory or context (its 'place' in the broadest sense of that word) of the object directs the learner to include certain sources of information and exclude or ignore others as well as determining the way in which the object is understood. So, for argument's sake, we have a student who focuses on the object of the hand and this research was motivated by seeing photographs or images which drew his or her interest. Now, the hand within the domain of art and the hand for the anatomist are vastly different kinds of thing: the former would be directed towards artistic representation of the hand and an interpretative account of the conditions of artistic understanding (realism, impressionism, and so on), whereas the latter would be directed towards the hand understood within the representative paradigms of scientific thought (as possessing a function for Aristotle, as being an atom of the body made up of smaller atoms for our contemporaries, and so on). The former determines that the empirical research would be carried out in the art gallery, amongst the canons of the history of art and in conversation with practicing artists; the latter would be carried out in medical clinics, amongst the annals of medicine and in conversation with medical practitioners. And let us not forget that the hand can be a cultural object as well (the significance of henna tattoos and wedding rings) and is also subject to problematic issues(is a prosthetic hand a 'hand'?).

The identification of an object and the realisation of its territory, then, to a large extent determine the choice of a method. More importantly, the discussion of the context of an object can lead to the disclosure of implicit assumptions we bring to bear on it and the types of judgements we would make

about it. (In our above example, to describe the hand as 'beautiful', 'healthy' or as 'real' already belongs to one or other context.) In many respects, the choice of a methodology is a development of the research itself and the learner is to be made aware of rather than adopt a specific methodology. Hence, the intellectual demands are compensated somewhat.

Progression

The following table represents a simplified matrix of methodologies suited to specific territories. These territories are extremely generally understood, so we would reduce the 'hand' to a territory of art and science respectively and the actual student dissertations would be far more specific, but it serves to show both what is expected and a year-on-year progression. Of course, there is no presumption that these are context bound methodologies and any given methodology can be successfully applied to other territories. Neither should it be assumed that each dissertation should adopt only one methodology, but they must adopt at least one (which may not belong to this table – see above). One last provision ought also to be mentioned: the table below represents a distilled form of the methodologies encountered within the specific degree *Philosophical Studies: Knowledge and Human Interests* which has certain intellectual commitments towards specific traditions in philosophy (namely, modern European philosophy broadly construed) and reflects the content of the core modules on that specific course. The table below would have to be amended to better suit the particular degree programme in which the learning methodology is practiced.

Most normal/usual territory	**Stage 1**	**Stage 2**	**Stage 3**	**Key question**
	IMMEDIATE	REFLECTIVE	CRITICAL	
CULTURE/SOCIETY	Contrastive method (Phi1001, 1002, 1003)	Historical method (Phi2001, 2002)	Genealogy (Phi3005, 3006)	How did this happen/ come about?
ETHICS	Intuitionism/ foundationalism (Phi1001)	Reflective equilibrium [13] (Phi2003, 2006)	Axiological critique[14] (Phi3001, 3002, 3005)	Is this right/good?
ART	Interpretative	Theories of	Hermeneutics	What does it

[13] Rawls, 2001.
[14] MacIntyre, 1985; Marcuse, 1991.

	methodology (Phi1002, 1003)	difference (Phi2005)	[15] (Phi3001, 3002, 3003)	mean?
TECHNOLOGY/SCIENCE	Naïve inductivism[16] (Phi1001)	Hypothetico-deductive method[17] (Phi2001, 2002, 2003)	Paradigmatic relativism[18] (Phi3001, 3002)	What caused it to be like this?

Expansion on methodologies

Territory: culture/society

In stage 1, the choice of the historical methodology would usually involve an identification of a change whereby a contrast between two different epochs can be established. So, if one were to look at the issue of homosexuality within contemporary culture using the concepts of free-will and hedonism, one would have to empirically research the Ancient world's attitude, the attitude of the Enlightenment and the attitudes of our contemporaries showing the differences and offering some explanation of why these differences exist.

In stage 2, a similar methodology would be utilised, but with a greater degree of critical sensibility. One would have to be aware that one's understanding of the Ancient world may well itself be a product of one's contemporary position and an adequate reconstruction of Ancient attitudes and thought would have to be established, rather than relying on superficial generalisations (one thinks of Plato's attitudes as in some sense exceptional in the Ancient world and one will often describe the attitudes of the liberal elite rather than the hoi polloi when considering our contemporaries). A learner would have to demonstrate some degree of historical sensibility and to justify his or her arguments with reference to primary sources. (Skinner, 1974)

Finally, in stage 3, the onus will be on the learner to show that the historical method discloses cultural assumptions that determine one's understanding of a specific object and that there is a question of truth concerning the description and evaluation of the object. The learner will have to show that the contemporary attitudes may well be a product of a long historical process and the learner will have to attempt to distinguish between arbitrary and necessary developments. (Nietzsche, 1996; Foucault, 1972)

[15] Vattimo, 1997; Gadamer, 1989.
[16] Hollis, 1982, 33-41.
[17] Hollis, 1982: 41-54.
[18] Kuhn, 1970. Chalmers, 1982: chs. 8-9.

Territory: ethics

In stage 1, the learner would be expected to identify the object and to ask in very general terms whether the immediate intuitions concerning an object are justifiable or not. So, examining the rise of vegetarianism in the West using the concepts of rights and utility would necessarily involve testing statements concerning the supposed justice or injustice of the treatment of animals against intuitive counter-examples. (Ross, 1939, ch. 8) A contrast between cultures and historical epochs will bring to the fore different attitudes to the object at issue (Aristotle's views of things as grouped by their function as opposed to our reductionism).

In stage 2, again the immediacy of the general method must be questioned through a process of reflective equilibrium. So, for example, if we find the principle of equality to be coherent and right for us, yet are unable to extend this principle to non-human animals, then this needs to be explained. Either we have to reject our everyday intuition (that there is a axiological difference in kind between humans and non-human animals) or we must amend our grounding assumptions (equality). (Rawls, 2001; Singer, 1993: chs. 1-3) An historical or cultural contrast would serve to disclose the grounding assumptions more clearly (say, the farmer's understanding of the cow as a certain weight in kilograms and the child's understanding of it as 'Daisy'.).

Once again in stage 3, the reflective nature of the method progresses to a critical appreciation of the method itself. Is our understanding of what is right and good a cultural and social production or can be justified over and above its historical foundations? So, for example, one may well argue that vegetarianism is only possible within an advanced economy and shows the separation of the human from all natural relations. (MacIntyre, 1985; Marcuse, 1991) Such critical reflection would be aided by a cultural or historical contrast with a society with a very different moral fabric.

Territory: art

In stage 1, learners will be expected to offer a theory of interpretation for the object, be it intentional, structuralist and so on. Such methodology will answer the question: what does the object mean? So, the object of fairy tales may well resolve itself into a discussion of the structure of moral fables. A contrast between modern and pre-modern 'fairy tales' would reveal this social function.

In stage 2, students are introduced to a range of interpretative theories that demonstrate the difference of actual objects from our immediate understanding of them. Philosophical articulations of conceptual identity have typically subordinated the different to the same, picking out qualities that are identical across different cases in order to make a generalisation. As such, difference is understood to be merely relative to the concept of identity, e.g. as what befalls, contingently and accidentially, an individual case. Rather than understand difference in terms of a function of a concept of identity, philosophies of difference seek to grasp difference in itself, redeveloping key philosophical notions accordingly.[19]

In stage 3, learners would be expected to show how judgements about beauty and also meaning may well be determined by social and cultural conditions, bringing this out through the use once more of a

[19] With gratitude to Dr Lars Iyer for this description.

cultural or historical contrast and using this to disclose our own contemporary conditions of understanding. (Vattimo, 1997)

Territory: technology/science

In stage 1, learners will be most obviously concerned with the idea of knowing is perception. Say, for example, a leaner is motivated to look at the object of the Millennium Bridge over the Tyne using the concepts of community and materialism. Naïve intuitionism would allow him to form a hypothesis based on observations (both past and present) that bridges are developed at points of human need. Such a hypothesis would be tested by contemporary bridges which are not built in response to need but for other reasons (so a contrast between Florence's Ponte Vecchio and the Millennium Bridge would have to be explained). (Hollis, 1985: 33-41)

In stage 2, the method will be developed such that the hypothesis would be tested by observations and also predictions. (Hollis, 1985: 41-54)

In stage 3, issues of causality, comparing Aristotle's four-fold causality against the modern over determination of the efficient cause may well be questioned. The idea that the Millennium Bridge over the Tyne owes much to new materials, new ideas of community, iconography and tourism as to making a cultural connection between Gateshead and Newcastle. (Kuhn, 1970; Chalmers, 1982: chs. 8-9)

A couple of remarks

Two pertinent remarks ought to be made. First, the idea of a contrast is prevalent in all methodologies whether this be an historical contrast, a cultural contrast or a philosophical one and it is developed in all stages.[20] This is important as it aids the learner to move away from an immediate understanding of an object and begins the reflective process on how objects are understood. Secondly, the process of progressive reflection throughout the stages results in an overlap in stage 3 such that the methods all converge on a critical reflection on the method itself understood as a possible product of cultural understanding. It is at this point that students are made aware of their own 'Ability to recognise methodological errors, rhetorical devices, unexamined conventional wisdom, unnoticed assumptions, vagueness and superficiality' (QAAHE, 2000: 3) in relation to a non-philosophical object and hence communicate to laypeople the worth of both philosophical knowledge and skills outside the limits of the degree itself.

Assessment

The assessment of the object-based dissertation should, then, incorporate an explicit relation to the use of a specific methodology. So, in stage 1, learners would be expected to describe the method they use. Stages 2 and 3 would also be expected to justify the use of that method over and above alternatives. Progression is measured by a sophistication in the choice of methods (see table above) and also: stage 1, a description of the method(s) (qualitatively evaluated as poor, adequate, good, excellent); stage 2, a description of the method(s) and a justification for this choice; and, finally, stage 3, a description, justification and an evaluation of the appropriateness of the method. Given the intellectual demands of

[20] See handout 4 in appendix B.

such a requirement, the discussion and selection of a methodology will be one of the most facilitator-intensive phases of the learning. Dedicated tutorials will be timetabled for just such a process.

§5| The nature of the questionnaires and data collection

Introduction

The claims and objectives of the current research were initially evaluated by the use of Likert scale questionnaires (with a few additional discursive questions) and later by the content of students' self-development plans (workbooks) and also informal discussions. The questionnaires were distributed to a variety of groups in a process of measuring students' *expectations* and *evaluations* and also to garner their mature *reflections*. Comments, appraisals and informal feedback were extracted from discussions with project groups (both this year and the last) reflecting on their learning experience and through self-appraisal present in the workbooks.

The first two aims (student expectation and evaluation) required asking current students a series of questions concerning the skills, knowledge and relevance of the programme at two points in the year: expectations were measured in October at the beginning of the module and evaluations, especially concerning any change in attitude towards the module, were garnered in March, 2009. (Ideally, the period from May to June would have been better for the evaluations part of the research, but I was motivated by the worry about number of respondents to bring this forward to just before the Easter break in March, a time when traditionally students begin to drift off into self-study mode.) These questionnaires were distributed to second and third year Philosophical Studies' students at Newcastle University, forming the main observation group, as well as students enrolled on a more traditional philosophy course (University of Glasgow) and on the various biology degree programmes at Newcastle University. Although not exhaustive, the data supplies the basis for comparative analysis along differing axes: expectations against evaluations, year on year progressive changes within Newcastle Philosophical Studies (PS) students, PS students at Newcastle compared with a traditional philosophy degree programme and finally the two humanities degrees compared to the natural science degree. The data was collected either via a distributed hardcopy (current PS students at Newcastle) or using the Surveymonkey site at http://www.surveymonkey.com/ (all other participants).

Finally, in order to satisfy the need for mature reflection to see whether the object-based learning approach does in fact fulfil its purported aims and purposes, a separate questionnaire was distributed to graduates of the Philosophical Studies programme at Newcastle University. In June, 2008, a virtual, social network was created on Facebook ('Philosophical Studies, Newcastle University', www.facebook.com) in order to gauge the attitudes and experiences of students after they have entered the workplace and to reflect on the merits of the programme. This questionnaire was distributed to graduates of 2008 who joined the social network group in October 2008, three months after they had graduated.

The questionnaires was split into two sections. The first sought to evaluate the first two of the three explicit claims of the PRS mini-project proposal: one, personalised learning is more appropriate to the development of core, critical skills than traditional programmes; and, two, students on the Philosophical Studies programme are more aware of their personal development of these skills. The questionnaires, though, avoided the temptation to simply ask whether a student agrees that he or she has acquired the

skill of, say, analytical skills. Such an approach would be worthless because if you were to ask a philosophy graduate whether they have improved their analytical skills, it would be rather odd to receive a negative answer. They are well prepared to express such sentiments in job interviews without being able to give substantial examples of how exactly they have developed these skills. Rather, I have tried to avoid this in two ways: by embedding the skills in indirect questions and leaving a free text box for the participants to name the three most significant skills, thus splitting their answers into implicit awareness of skills and explicit awareness of skills acquired (via a free text box that asks them to list the three most significant skills acquired). The purpose of the second section was to evaluate the re-orientated third claim of the research: the Project module is discipline affirming in that students are more aware of the value of philosophical knowledge beyond the academy than traditional students.

The two sections of the October questionnaires can then be understood as: (A1) the development of skills and (B) the relevance of knowledge; whereas the March questionnaires repeated these two sections but changed the flavour of the first section into (A2): self-awareness of personal development. The 'reflections' questionnaire was specific to graduates of Philosophical Studies. The Likert scale was an optional six-point scale corresponding to: (1) strongly agree; (2) agree; (3) agree somewhat; (4) disagree somewhat; (5) disagree; and (6) strongly disagree. (Examples of the full questionnaires are included below.) Section B served to indicate the discipline affirming nature of the personalised project learning compared to other programmes as dictated by the reorientation of the research as outlined in the present introduction above.

Questionnaires were distributed to current students in Philosophical Studies (but divided by year) in hard copy during the modules PHi1001, PHi2003 and PHi3001 which are compulsory requirements for all students undertaking the degree programme. Questionnaires for past students were, as mentioned, advertised through the Facebook group and then collected by the surveymonkey.com website. Similarly, information from other institutions was gathered via the surveymonkey.com website. The addresses of the questionnaires were:

Questionnaire 1 (expectations):
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=xQ3qWP57REO6DSJxLb8goQ_3d_3d

Questionnaire 2 (evaluations):

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=pDXs7Y2wKK24WhYGzm1MbQ_3d_3d

Questionnaire 3 (graduates):
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=OEGw7rNvZDh6_2fhLGb0rZPA_3d_3d

Summary reminder

Remember that the skills developed on a philosophy degree are:

a) Articulacy
b) Rationality

c) Rigorousness
d) Critical reflectivity
e) Flexibility
f) Creativity
g) Independence

And that one is trying to discover any awareness in the learner of the relevance of the concepts and ideals of philosophy in general to the workplace and non-academic world. As far as the skills development is concerned (section A), the questions map on to the relevant skills in this manner: (a) is covered by 1 and 2; (b) 1, 2, 3; (c) 4; (d) 5; (e) 6, 7; (f) 8; and (g) 9. The translation of the implicit questions into the results with reference to the specific skill were carried out by a simple averaging so that, for example, to determine how many students strongly agreed that they will (or had) improved their articulacy, questions 1 and 2 were summed and divided by 2, and for rationality, questions 1,2 and 3 were summed and divided by 3. I did not see the overlap of the questions as any real cause for concern. A translation of the free text answers into one of the categories a-g was carried out within the remit of common sense.

Questionnaire 1: expectations

- Institution: XXXX
- Degree Programme: XXXX
- Year of study: XXXX[21]

Section A1| Development of skills

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements (1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = agree somewhat; 4 = disagree somewhat; 5 = disagree; 6 = strongly disagree). By undertaking my current course of studies and degree programme:

1. I shall become better at expressing ideas and arguments in writing.
2. I shall become better at expressing ideas and arguments in oral situations.
3. I shall be able to persuade people of my own views and ideas more easily.
4. I will learn to recognise good arguments about a range of issues.
5. I shall be more prepared to change my own ideas in light of good reasons.
6. I shall improve my ability to interpret and comprehend other people's views and ideas.
7. I shall learn to be tolerant of ideas that differ from my own.
8. I shall learn to be more creative in responding to problems and situations.
9. I will develop the ability to think for myself and to support my own ideas.
10. Please list the three most significant skills you will develop on the degree programme.

[21] Requesting such information (here and in subsequent questionnaires) can, of course, undermine anonymity of participants. However, given both the nature of the research and the information requested, this seems to be minimally problematic. The research was cleared by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at Newcastle University.

Section B| The relevance of knowledge

Please indicate how far you agree with the following statements (1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = agree somewhat; 4 = disagree somewhat; 5 = disagree; 6 = strongly disagree):

1. The knowledge I learn on my course will be useful after I graduate.
2. Potential employers will be interested in what I have learnt in the degree programme's modules.
3. I will retain much of the knowledge and facts from my course after I leave university.
4. The material and content of lectures is useful only for passing my degree.
5. I consider my degree to be appropriate for a specific employment niche.

Questionnaire 2: evaluations

- Institution: XXXX
- Degree Programme: XXXX
- Year of study: XXXX

Section A2| Self-awareness of personal development

Please indicate how far you agree with the following statements (1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = agree somewhat; 4 = disagree somewhat; 5 = disagree; 6 = strongly disagree):

My degree programme has improved my ability to:

1. Express ideas and arguments in writing.
2. express ideas and arguments in oral situations.
3. persuade people of my own views and ideas more easily.
4. recognise good arguments about a range of issues.
5. be more prepared to change my own ideas in light of good reasons.
6. interpret and comprehend other people's views and ideas.
7. learn to be tolerant of ideas that differ from my own.
8. learn to be more creative in responding to problems and situations.
9. develop the ability to think for myself and to support my own ideas.
10. Please list the three most significant skills you developed on the degree programme.

Section B| The relevance of knowledge

Please indicate how far you agree with the following statements (1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = agree somewhat; 4 = disagree somewhat; 5 = disagree; 6 = strongly disagree):

1. The knowledge I have learnt on my course will be useful after I graduate.
2. Potential employers will be interested in what I have learnt in the degree programme's modules.
3. I will retain much of the knowledge and facts from my course after I leave university.
4. The material and content of lectures was useful only for passing my degree.
5. I consider my degree to be appropriate for a specific employment niche.

Questionnaire 3: reflections

Current employment: XXXX

Skills

Please indicate how far you agree with the following statements (1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = agree somewhat; 4 = disagree somewhat; 5 = disagree; 6 = strongly disagree):

1. I often use skills and methods from my degree programme in my work.
2. My degree programme prepared me for my current work.
3. My work would be more difficult had I taken a different degree.
4. Please list the skills which you developed on your degree programme that are most useful at work:

Knowledge

Please indicate how far you agree with the following statements (1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = agree somewhat; 4 = disagree somewhat; 5 = disagree; 6 = strongly disagree):

1. I can confidently communicate the worth of my degree to other people.
2. I use material from courses and my degree programme in the context of my work.
3. The concepts and ideas from my degree programme are useful for my work.
4. My employers are aware of the subject of my degree.
5. The subject of my degree programme was useful in securing a job.

§6| Analysis of the empirical data

Provisos

Let me begin with a whole list of provisos. First, the response level was low, although nowhere near as poor as first feared. I was fortunate enough to receive comparators from the natural sciences (biology students at Newcastle University) and from a traditional philosophy degree programme (University of Glasgow), but the overall numbers were such that any conclusions reached based on the figures must never be anything more than an observation of a possible trend. On reflection, the hard copy approach ensures a better response rate and in future participation could be increased by mailing questionnaires to interested colleagues with a return envelope included and also prizes could be offered for participation (the famous iPod draw!). Empirical data were, it is true, always going to play the role of reinforcing a priori considerations and would never have constituted proof unless the data samples were larger and carried out over a period of years using a control group.

Second, I am not a social scientist and the need for empirical data that can be statistically compiled is not perhaps the best way to approach questions of the nature I am asking because this required that I translate how the students understood the Likert statements as well as translating their free text answers into one of the listed skills. Such translations were suspicious at best. Neither can I guarantee that the respondents are representative of either the population at large or the subset of undergraduates. Moreover, I cannot guarantee that the respondents to the expectations correspond with the respondents to the evaluations questionnaire. I believe a statistician would reject the cogency and validity of the results I have compiled out of hand. It should be remembered, though, that the questionnaires form only part of the 'evidence' being gathered. There is much to be gained from the project development plan handed in by students and informal discussions with current and past students of the programme. The questionnaires do reveal something about the attitudes of students even if, in future, I would do things differently.

The answers to the questionnaires are to be divided into three broad areas of interest: students' implicit skill awareness (their answers to the Likert scale questions), students' explicit skill awareness (their answers in the free text box) and the evaluation of the relevance of the discipline outside the academy (answers to the second set of questions in the Likert scale). The data is collected and represented graphically in appendix E at the end of this report.

Expectations

Observations on the result: implicit skill awareness

The distributions for the Philosophical Studies degree at Newcastle and the more traditional degree at Glasgow University are amazingly similar. Perhaps the skills of independence and creativity are more prominent in the PS Newcastle students and it is interesting to note that these skills improve throughout the stages and could perhaps reflect a specific advantage of the personalised approach to learning. There is no massive science versus humanities dichotomy when comparing the biology students to both these distributions. There is no reason there should be, of course: the skills developed are general

graduate skills sought by employers and, although, they may be more or less prominent from subject to subject, a good education ought to develop them all no matter the subject matter

Observations on the result: explicit skill awareness

Again the models of the two philosophy degrees were very similar and there was no pattern through the progressive stages of the Newcastle degree. Biology students added teamwork and experimental laboratory skills which did not feature in the philosophy students' mindset. (Not surprising with reference to the latter, but the former ought to be noted here and compared with the results in the graduate, mature reflections, questionnaire.) Similarly flexibility and critical reflectivity were lower in the biology students, perhaps because students expected that thinking one way and taking for granted certain theoretical assumptions is a given and necessary to engage fruitfully in the subject at all.

Observations on the result: discipline relevance beyond the academy

This is perhaps the most interesting result of the whole questionnaire in that PS students at Newcastle University seemed to reflect the reorientation of this research project concerning the discipline affirming nature of the personalised, object-based Project. Looking at the statement 'I consider my degree to be appropriate for a specific employment niche', PS responded in a way more akin to the biology students than the traditional philosophy students. Again, the agreement to this statement increases through the progressive years of the degree and so may be due to the impact of the Project learning approach.

Evaluations

Observations on the result: implicit skill awareness

First, a point about development. Separating stages 1 through 3 in Philosophical Studies at Newcastle University makes it possible to see a trend of increasing agreement with the statements that indicate the ability to use a specific skill. There is a trend to stronger agreement from the expectations to the evaluations and also year on year. One would expect such a trend in whichever degree. Unfortunately, there was no data to support this expectation since other groups were not divided by year.

Second, stage 1 Newcastle students are very much static from the beginning to the end of the year in implicit awareness of skill acquisition, but there is an improvement in agreement to the skills of independence and creativity for stage 2 from the beginning of their second year to its end. In stage 3, the expectations to evaluations comparison also indicates a development of the skills of articulacy, rationality and critical reflectivity. All in all, stages 2 and 3's implicit awareness of skill acquisition increases and shifts towards a stronger agreement with those statements that indicate an ability to exercise such skills. However, for philosophy students at Glasgow University and biology students at Newcastle University there is very little change from the beginning of the year to the end of the year in the acquisition of skills. What they expected is what they believe they have received, perhaps revealing not so much the non-acquisition of other skills but an unreflective engagement with their own learning. It could be that Philosophical Studies' students at Newcastle, through object-based learning, are somehow more involved and thus more reflective on their actual development as learners and persons.

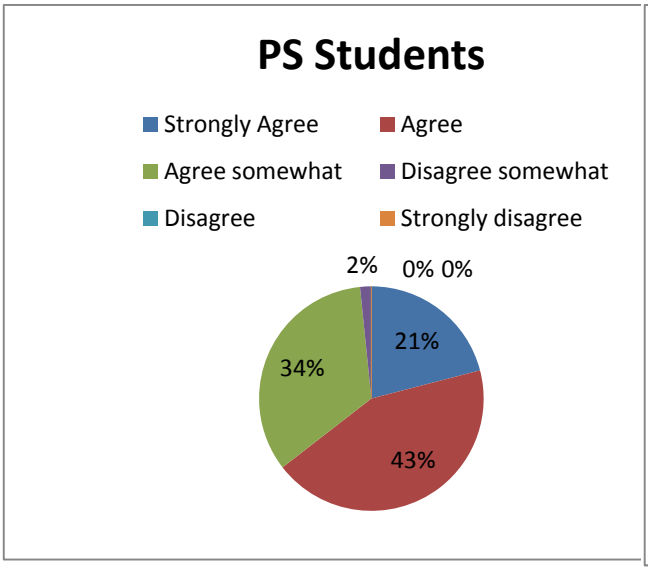
A direct comparison between Philosophical Studies' students at Newcastle and Glasgow reveals that the former are implicitly aware of acquiring creativity and independence over and above the more traditional philosophical skills of articulacy, rationality and critical reflectivity.

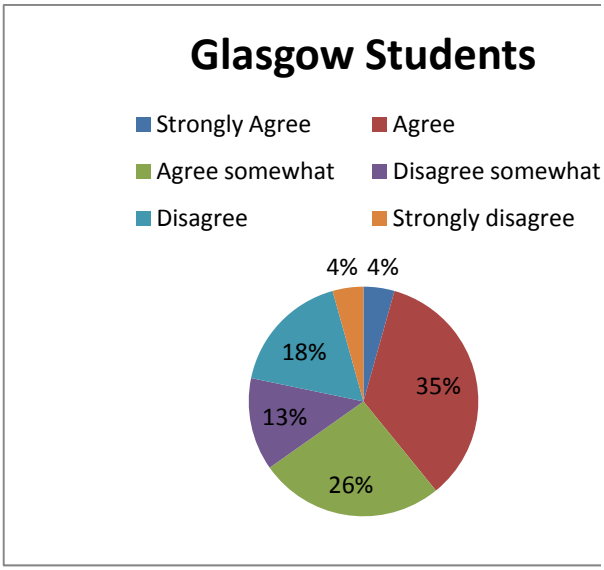
Observations on the result: explicit skill awareness

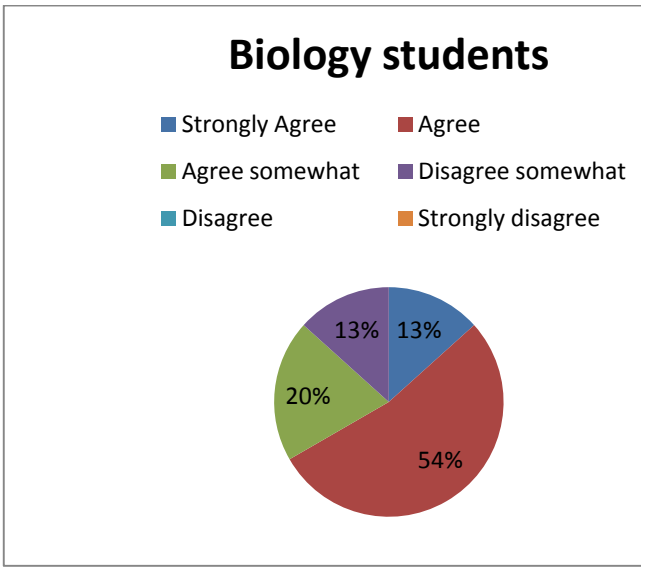
The evaluations of stage 1 Newcastle Students are pretty much static from their expectations on entering the year. The real rise occurs in the development from the expectations to the evaluation of stage 2 (that is, from the beginning of October to the end of March in the second year) where the data tracks an explicit rise in awareness of acquiring 'rigorousness' (it is not nominated at all in the expectations, but rises to 17% of all answers) tempered by a drop in critical reflectivity (from 26% to 7%). However, the explicit awareness free text box was limited to three answers and so rises in one answer have to be compensated by redistribution of other figures. The explicit awareness tracks those skills most immediately obvious to students and non-nomination does not, therefore, denote an absence. So, for example, the fall in critical reflectivity is not supported by the implicit awareness of skill acquisition where there is a shift to a stronger agreement with those statements that indicate an ability to critically reflect. In stage 3, explicitly, though, there is a substantial fall in the nominations of independence (from 33 to 5% of nominations) with a rise in the nominations of rigorousness (from 0 to 24%), but this is once more not supported by the implicit awareness and so must be due to the presence of other immediate skills becoming known to students. Compare this to the figures of Glasgow students on a more traditional philosophy degree, who were explicitly aware of acquiring the skill of rigorousness (a rise from 6 to 28% of nominations) whilst forgetting that they thought the degree would make them more independent (a fall from 18 to 0% of nominations). Again, these figures are not supported by their implicit awareness, but it seems that the object-based approach may support the explicit awareness of specific skills belonging to the set of philosophical skills. Similarly, with biology students there is a fall in the nominations of independence which is again not supported by the implicit awareness of students. Once more, it seems that the personalised approach to learning that involves an explicit questioning of why the student is engaging in a particular project supports an explicit awareness of key skills.

Observations on the result: discipline relevance beyond the academy

Overall, the relevance of knowledge outside the academy was very static with expectations at the beginning of the year changing very little by the end of the year. Moreover, Philosophical Studies, the traditional philosophy programme and the biology programme were very similar in the results with no difference between the humanities and the sciences concerning the relevance of knowledge being learnt. However, one of the objectives of this project was to justify the discipline-affirming nature of the context-based approach, that is the claim that skill acquisition can be embedded in the learning programme such that the discipline and its body of knowledge will become relevant to the student. One point of distinction between the results was with reference to the statement 'potential employers will be interested in what I have learnt in the degree programme's modules'. 21% of PS students 'strongly agreed' and 43% 'agreed' with the statement compared with 4% 'strongly agreed' and 35% 'agreed' of traditional philosophy students. (The results for biology were 13% 'strongly agreed' and 54% 'agreed'.)







And what is clear is the fact that Philosophical Studies' students view the knowledge and concepts they acquire on the degree as interesting to potential employers much more so than students on a traditional philosophy degree and much more in align with a natural science degree (in this case biology). The PS students are aware that the substantial epistemic content of a philosophy programme is exclusive not only to the academy but is relevant beyond it.

Mature reflection

Observations: graduates of Newcastle University

The results of graduates of the programme at Newcastle University tally very much with what has already been observed, but one interesting point of note in the emergence of 'teamwork' as a nominated and appreciated skill acquired from their degree programme. Perhaps until they realise that it is required in the workplace and what it entails, students are unaware of its possession, seeing 'teamwork' as different in kind from many of the group activities now embedded in teaching and learning methodology when it is, in fact, not.

Informal discussions, personal development plans and student feedback

The variety of colloquial sources of data, be it from the self-development plan of students, feedback sessions and module questionnaires or simple informal discussions reveals a wealth of positive comments. I include a few extracts here:

> Before embarking upon the project I had thought I wanted to go into advertising. The project pushed me to get work experience (and it was also good to be able to mention that I had been doing a project on the subject when I applied… plus had lots of knowledge when I went there). The work experience and my research from the project into the advertising industry made me realise that I didn't actually want to go into advertising as a career.

> It was through prospective job interviews that I really utilised the practical aspects of philosophy, it gave me the ability to recognise networks in knowledge and everyday life in order to best argue a point, make an informed decision and have confidence when undertaking tasks. Throughout the duration of the course you will get used to the question 'What are you going to do with a Philosophy Degree?' my answer to this was found while creating my Stage 3 project. The project gave me the opportunity to use my knowledge of philosophy in a way that focused on what I was interested in, I chose personhood and Dementia. While writing my project I volunteered at a care home, and soon took on a job as a care worker and now am planning on applying for a Masters Degree in a related field. The project enables me to have a physical tribute to my efforts and enjoyment of the course over the last three years. It also stands as a piece of work that shows prospective employers my commitment, ability to apply philosophy practically and interests in a way that makes me stand out from the crowd.

> The greatest thing I can say in favour of the degree is that at the end of these three years I find myself unable to live without philosophy. What the course teaches the student is not so much philosophy as a new skill with which to analyse the world, but philosophy as something which can't be separated from everyday life. The course allows each student to bring his own interests into philosophy, regardless of how

varied or unimportant they might seem, and shows the student that nothing is unimportant to philosophy… this course not only helps you develop the skills necessary for a colourful and interesting career in the future, but also helps you develop yourself for your own sake. This self-development becomes inseparable from the skills necessary for a career, and through such self-development the student leaves the course equipped with the imagination and creativity required to start a career in whatever field he may choose.

The project module each year is a fantastic opportunity to take the thinkers off the course and utilise them in relation to ones interests which prevent the degree from being that feared work element in your life isolated from what really interests you. As such, over the three years the course never felt like it was a chore but rather became a pleasure and an interest akin to my passions in music and the like.

The projects were particularly useful as well, as they allowed me to apply the knowledge I gained in Philosophical Studies to other areas. My third year project was on Architecture and Town Planning in Newcastle, and doing this project helped me gain a place on a Masters degree in Town Planning which enable me to work as a qualified town planner.

Initially I chose to study philosophy because I enjoyed the material itself but I soon learnt that philosophy is part of our everyday lives and I have found it to be increasingly relevant to the way I think and behave. Although I am not going to take my degree any further after I leave university, as I am due to join the armed forces, it is a subject that has very much broadened my horizons and I believe it to be useful in the way I will apply myself to different situations in the future.

Completing an individual research project in all three stages of the course has allowed me to use my studies to examine issues of particular personal interest to me…This has allowed me to deepen my understanding of thinkers not fully covered on the course. I feel that this opportunity has helped me to develop my research skills and independent thought.

My skills have improved in all areas from public speaking to writing but most of all I have improvement ability to think. No employer could deny this as valuable…The reason that Newcastle was my first choice of University is down to the degree structure in terms of the project. Not only does it make doing work more enjoyable when we are given the option to choose what we study, but the opportunity to apply my degree skills and knowledge to the real world is priceless. The fact that I am able to show my employer how my assessments have not been based on the regurgitation of memorised knowledge but have actually been utilised within reality, fills me with confidence. I used to worry when people asked me the question, ‘and where is that

going to get you then', now they wish they'd never asked. I feel as though I have constantly progressed throughout my time here and I can honestly say I am proud of what I have achieved.

I feel that the project really brings together all the lecture material in the sense that you are able to see how the philosophical theories we have studied in class can be linked to pretty much any aspect of everyday life.

I have improved on skills such as presentation, as before I started the course I was a very nervous and reluctant public speaker. I have also improved in my analysis of texts, and ability to express an argument… In terms of the project module, I feel that it is a great way to link the philosophy degree to future plans or interests. As I plan to undertake a nursing course after finishing this degree, I have chosen to focus my project on the relationship of care between healthcare professionals and patients. This has been very useful in my interviews for nursing, as I am able to explain that my current course is relevant to my future career path.

Although their lecturing styles may vary, each lecturer delivers complex and intellectually challenging material successfully. By using various examples, each theory is show in terms of its contemporary significance allowing students to apply pre established philosophical theories to issues that are found within the modern day. This process is specifically prevalent in the Project module, which has allowed me to exercise my own ability to apply philosophical theory to a concept or territory of my own choice. Given the opportunity to peruse a project of my own choice, I have been able to actively engage in philosophy from a level of personal interest. Rather than simply regurgitating theories and existing critical analysis, the project has given me free reign over how I wish to use the specific material I have studied, knowing that marks will be gained through a critical engagement on personal level. In summery Philosophical Studies is a degree programme that allows its students to be actively involved in their studies which, I believe, has helped me develop on both an intellectual and personal level.

it was the project that really made what we were studying in the lectures relevant to everyday life. My project was able to give me a chance to use philosophical concepts, which I preferred and relate them to a topic which I had chosen, and therefore was interested in. It also gave me an opportunity to choose subjects which I may not have found the time to research normally and be able to investigate them fully as part of my degree. Philosophical studies has enabled me to take vast amounts of information and sort it into relevant material which I can then use in my essays or project. The regular presentations, which at first daunted me no longer, have the same effect. They are a way of putting forward ideas in a way in which I feel will be interesting and useful for others, making these regular have meant that hopefully

> when and if it comes to me having to speak in public in the workplace I shouldn't struggle too much… The project in particular makes regular contact with your project leader a vital part of the development process.

Conclusions

No concrete conclusions can be drawn from such a small and unconditional sample of data, but certain intuitions concerning the nature of context based learning can be supported by both the statistics and the personal testimonies. It is clear that the non-traditional approach at Newcastle is not producing a different set of skills or harming those traditional set of philosophical skills acquired through reading for a philosophy degree. However, the aim was to substantiate the claims that one, personalised learning is more appropriate to the development of core, critical skills than traditional programmes; and, two, students on the Philosophical Studies programme are more aware of their personal development of these skills. There is unfortunately no statistical evidence to support the former of these claims, but there is a slight indication to support the latter. Yet, one should not underestimate the explicit awareness of skill acquisition that is more fairly distributed amongst the PS students than their traditional counterparts and also the indication that independence, obviously a consequence of the research intensive and personal aspect of the object-based learning, is an ability that PS students are aware, both implicitly and explicitly, of possessing to a seemingly greater extent than their counterparts.

However, PS students do seem more inclined to view philosophical knowledge as relevant beyond their degrees and appropriate for the workplace, as substantiated in the personal testimonies. Couple this with the willingness and ability to relate philosophical knowledge to both skill acquisition (as demonstrated by their wide distribution of explicit awareness) and external territories (possibly workplaces or at least objects in the cultural world in a broad sense), then object-based learning allows students to answer the perennial interview question 'How do you see your degree as relevant to the current vacancy in our company?' with more than the 'It has taught me to be analytic and rigorous, formulate rational arguments…' as all students would answer. Rather our students are able to answer in relation to their projects, be they about education, the workplace, architecture and so and so forth. Through such answers, they are able to demonstrate the worth of philosophical knowledge to the employer and not just as means to acquiring skills desired by the would-be employer.

§7| Evaluation of mini-project's achievements

Reminder: the intended aims and outcomes

The present research was an investigation carried out into the nature and advantages of the personalised, object-based learning approach of the Project as part of the Philosophical Studies degree at Newcastle University. The three research questions guiding the investigation were:

4. Is personalised learning more appropriate to the development of core critical skills than traditional programmes?

5. Are students actually aware of the benefits of personalised learning?

6. Are students aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy?

And on the basis of these three questions, the aims of the current report were clearly defined and stated. The intended **aims** of the current investigation were:

4. To investigate whether the object-based, personalised approach to learning better develops the core critical skills as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies;

5. To determine to what extent the object-based, personalised approach to learning makes students aware of the acquisition of the core critical skills as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies;

6. To determine to what extent the object-based, personalised approach to learning makes students aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy.

Research question 1: Is personalised learning more appropriate to the development of core critical skills than traditional programmes?

The first research question is directly linked to the first aim of the mini-project, that is 'To investigate whether the object-based, personalised approach to learning better develops the core critical skills as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies.' In chapter two, the transferable skills developed and/or acquired on a standard philosophy degree were listed: articulacy, rationality, rigorousness, critical reflectivity, flexibility, creativity and independence. As seen in the last chapter, there was no evidence to support the claim that students on the Philosophical Studies degree programme at Newcastle University possessed any advantage over traditional programmes (in this case, the Philosophy degree programmes at the University of Glasgow). The degree programme at Newcastle, based as it is in personalised, object-based learning, does not produce a different set of skills nor does it do so better than a traditional programme. There is, perhaps, more evidence of independence and creativity due to the heavy autonomous and personal nature of the undergraduate research, as would be expected. So, the answer to the first research question would seem to be no, that personalised learning approach is not more appropriate to the development of core critical skills, neither is it more

inappropriate, it is just a different learning methodology that is perhaps more appropriate or less appropriate with reference to the particular student and his or her own learning preferences.

Research question 2: are students actually aware of the benefits of personalised learning?

The second research question was translated into the second ain of the current research, that is 'To determine to what extent the object-based, personalised approach to learning makes students aware of the acquisition of the core critical skills as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies.' Such a question need not be limited to discussion of the acquisition of skills, since 'benefits' can be understood more widely, but since the third question below deals with the value of a philosophical education and its concepts, it is best to reduce this question to one concerning the acquisition of core, critical skills. In comparison with the more traditional programme, one sees that students at Newcastle University are aware of a broader set of skills than their traditional counterparts and the testimonies of past and current students expresses a string link between the skills acquired on the degree programme and tasks carried out in everyday and work life. The overall impression given by the data, both formal and informal, seems to suggest that yes, Newcastle University students are more aware of the acquisition of core critical skills as an implicit benefit of their degree programme in philosophy.

Research question 3: Are students aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy?

Once more, the question is explicitly expressed as an aim of the current research: 'To determine to what extent the object-based, personalised approach to learning makes students aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy.' This last question, the discipline-affirming nature of the personalised, object-based learning methodology, is the most definitive of the successes. Both the statistical data and, more specifically, the personal testimonies of the students at Newcastle University demonstrate the bridge between philosophical theory and the 'real world' is one that is both in the students' awareness and one they are sincerely confident to traverse. Many of the testimonies tell of the personal development of viewing philosophy as merely the subject matter of the degree to a realisation of its importance in other (almost all other) aspects of the students' life. The connection between their studies and their prospective workplaces or further educational destinations is often explicitly made. Even if no other achievement had been made in the current investigation, the confirmation of the intuition that the personalised, object-based learning approach is discipline-affirming for philosophy, then it would have been a success. So, the answer to the final research question would be, yes, students are aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy.

Summary of aims and results

Research question	Answer
Is personalised learning more appropriate to the development of core critical skills than	No

traditional programmes?	
Are students actually aware of the benefits of personalised learning?	Yes
Are students aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy?	Yes

Intended outcomes

The envisaged intended **outcomes** of the current research were:

1. To develop a methodology for the teaching and learning of object-based learning that can be transferred to other institutions and to produce guidelines and a guidebook including examples of student handouts;
2. To ensure that students see the worth of their degree programme in terms of skill acquisition and can communicate this to others with the aid of concrete examples;
3. To ensure that students see the worth of the epistemic content of their degree programme and can communicate this to others with little or no background in philosophy.

The evidence supporting the achievement of outcome 1 is contained within the current report: the teaching, learning and assessment methodology is expressed in chapters 3 and 4 and student handouts are reproduced in appendix B. It should be mentioned that both the methodology and the handouts are, of course, in continuous development, but they do both articulate the current approach and its structure.

Outcomes two and three also seem to have been met as evidenced in the explicit skill acquisition part of the questionnaire and also the relevance of the knowledge section. More importantly, the extracts quoted from the informal reflections on the personalised, object-based learning approach, repeatedly refer to the relationship between the philosophical content of the research project and life-choices, understood in a very broad sense. There is also ample evidence to support a growth in the confidence of students to express the worth of their own degree work beyond the walls of the university.

Evaluative reflections

The reorientation of the current research to the issue of the discipline-affirming nature of the personalised, object-based learning was both a natural and an advantageous move. There was an initial complacence in the belief that the approach was better at developing the core critical skills, when a little reflection would perhaps have reminded me of the long standing traditional success of philosophy degrees and their graduates in this country. However, the explicit awareness of the acquisition of these skills in concrete situations as well as the awareness of the value of philosophical knowledge should not be underestimated. The personalised, object-based learning approach, if nothing else, serves to

demonstrate why one might want to engage with and purse a philosophical education even if (and so few will) one will not concern themselves with exclusively philosophical concerns after graduation.

Improvements with hindsight that could have been made to the current investigation focus almost exclusively on the collection and analysis of the empirical data. I am no social scientists and that has become painfully clear in the foregoing investigation. Should the research be continued in the future, two things need to be considered. Instead of simple Likert questionnaires, the role of the personal development plan ought to augmented and compared to the learning journals common at other universities.[22] Also, focus discussion groups rather than simple questionnaires ought to be utilised as I became more and more aware of the superior nature of the personal testimonies to the investigation at hand.

Dissemination

The final consideration of the current report will be the success of the dissemination of the information contained here. An initial paper, 'Personalised, Object-based Learning: Philosophical Theory and Contemporary Relevance', was given at the *Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Conference 2008 - Valuing Higher Education*, in Liverpool in December. However, the conference was both too broad and large for specific feedback, although some general comments have been incorporated into the writing of the report. Future conferences ought to be discipline specific to ensure better discussion. Journal papers will be produced on the basis of this research and with the guidance of the Subject Centre. This report will, with permission, be made available on the Philosophical Studies' website as well as the Subject Centre's own website.

[22] The personal development plan (or 'workbook') is at present a contentious issue amongst students since they view it as an extra burden that procures no reward. Many fail to see it as worthwhile to them and are guilty of either handing in just a collection of notes or handing in nothing at all. Next year, I wish to experiment with a wiki based approach for those students who wish to participate, hence allowing me to offer continuous engagement with their written as well as oral development.

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Appendices

Appendix A| Glossary

Active Learning – academic work that is more student-driven than usual, in which the learner actively shapes what it is he or she is learning, and the way in which he or she learns.

Book of Change – the online archive we keep of student abstracts outlining their project work, accessible at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/philosophicalstudies/.

Concepts – the philosophical concepts and ideas, drawn from the lecture courses, that the learner has chosen to apply to his or her object. It is often useful to relate them directly to relevant thinkers. So, looking at the object of 'woman' in the territory of 'the family', the concepts of 'property' and 'contract' in relation to Kant seem immediately salient.

Entry for the Book of Change – a small webpage summary of the student's project. We also display Book of Change entries on our noticeboards, to stimulate ideas and discussion. Such entries should state the objective/aim of the project (*what* it is intended to establish), the concepts to be utilised, as well as the methodology employed (*how* it is intended to be established).

Independent Learning – academic work in which the student, in consultation with his or her supervisor, has a larger role than usual in shaping his or her learning agenda.

Methodology – that section of the project dissertation that specifies *how* you intend to explore your chosen territory with philosophical concepts.

Object – the 'thing' which interests the student and to which he or she wishes to devote personal research. It can be as abstract as 'Love', as general as 'Music', 'Advertising' or 'Architecture' or as particular as 'Beethoven's Ode to Joy', 'Benetton shock advertising' or 'Manchester's Beetham Tower'.

Personal development plan ('workbook') – an archive of sources, collection of notes and a reflection on the learning process by the student him or herself. It can be as simple as a notebook or as complex as a student journal, but, typically, they would include quotations, printouts from the net, a growing bibliography, a statement of intent and reflections on methodology and learning outcomes. The workbooks should be reviewed by supervisors in January along with the Project Progress Reports and also handed in with the final project dissertation.

Personalised Learning – academic work that is tailored towards the uniqueness and individuality of each learner, rather than following a 'one size fits all' model.

Project – abbreviated description of the learning process best described as a personalised, object-centred research project and can often, colloquially and exclusively, refer to the project dissertation.

Project Dissertation – a 4000 word (stage 1) or an 8000 word (stages 2 and 3) essay, to be handed in on a set day during the assessment period of Semester 2. The dissertation, generally speaking, expresses more freedom in presentation style than a conventional academic essay; for example, the learner can include illustrations, subchapters and appendices when relevant. However, it must include an

introduction explaining the student's original motivation and fully developed objective or aim as well as a section discussing methodology.

Project Group – a group of students who meet with their project supervisor regularly. This may comprise all the students who are supervised in a particular stage, or just some of them.

Project Presentation – a 5-10 minute talk on the learner's project and progress. Audio-visual aids (PowerPoint, overhead projection) are at the students' disposal and they can distribute photocopied handouts if they wish. They are also encouraged not to merely read out from a piece of paper. There are two presentations over the academic year: the first after teaching starts in January, and the second towards the end of the second semester in May prior to the university assessment period.

Project Progress Report – a short piece (500 words – not included in the final word count) summarizing research on the object so far and the philosophical ideas intended to be used to explore it.

Project Session – a meeting, be it 1-to-1 or in a larger group in which project studies are directed

Project Supervisor – the member of staff assigned to the student at the beginning of the year to direct his or her project.

Supervisor – see Project Supervisor.

Territory – the area, place or context within which you will explore the object of your project. So, for example, one may well look at the object of 'the woman' in the territory of representational art, or within the territory of the family, or within the place of the home, or in the territory of biological sciences and so on. Each different territory will provoke different questions and more than probably demand a different methodology and approach to the object.

Workbook – colloquial term for the personal development plan.

Appendix B| Student handouts

1| Introduction

Overview

Briefly …

The Project is a 40 credit module in Philosophical Studies driven by what is called *personalised learning*, in which you set your research agenda on a particular topic after consultation with a member of staff and, guided in one-to-one and small group sessions, produce an 8,000 word dissertation on the topic in question.

At greater length …

The Project is at the heart of your degree course. Broadly speaking, it is intended to enable you to bring what you have learnt on the course into dialogue with events in the non-academic world, enabling you to link ideas you've encountered on your modules with broader concerns.

Each of you will have already been assigned a project supervisor with whom you will continue to work. The supervisor is usually, but not always, your personal tutor. You will be expected to attend weekly or fortnightly sessions with your supervisor throughout the academic year, which may take different forms – one to one meetings or group sessions, in which your supervisor and other students s/he supervises will be present.

Your supervisor will work with you in small group and one-to-one sessions throughout the academic year. The first task, with which your supervisor will assist you, is to arrive at an idea of an appropriate project object – a well defined area, e.g., literary society in Weimar Germany, breakdancing in New York in the early 1980s, the Ouseburn Valley in Newcastle during the years of its regeneration (from the mid 1990s to the present) with respect to which you will then conduct appropriate research, e.g., reading books and articles, discussing the area in question with scholars in the field, or, in the case of the Ouseburn Valley, paying a call to the Visitor Centre.

Your next task is to begin to explore that object philosophically, drawing on ideas you encounter on your modules in Philosophical Studies. Your supervisor will assist you in finding suitable ideas to philosophically explore your object. Group work is extremely useful in this respect, as your fellow students may well be drawing upon similar ideas to explore their objects.

Writing your project dissertation should be an engaging, fulfilling task, reflecting your individual interests, since you have a major say in the object you want to explore and the way you want to explore it. The project, as we have seen, is an example of *personalised learning* is often used to describe what is specific to this kind of open-ended research work. As a student, you will, more than is usual than on other modules, actively shape your learning agenda.

You should remember these phrases, as they will be useful when it comes to making applications for jobs or further study after you graduate. Indeed, the Project is conceived to get you thinking about what it is you want to do when you leave university. For example, one student explored Japanese Noise Music

and won a university scholarship to pursue his interests on an MA in music in the International Centre for Music Studies here at Newcastle University. Another student explored models of business ethics in his project and went on to work in the firm in which he sought work experience as part of his project. A further student, who explored the place of the Baltic art gallery in the regeneration of Newcastle now oversees the provision of the arts in the regeneration of her hometown as part of her work with the County Council.

Rationale

Why do we deem the Project such an important element of your studies? To be sure, it allows students to produce creative, original work which our External Examiners, visiting us from other universities, have always praised. But more broadly, we believe it provides you with transferable skills that will be useful to you in the workplace and in further study. Employers are keen to seek out active, agenda-setting employees, who are able to meet new challenges with flexibility and creativity; it is our belief that projects foster these and other virtues. We know from former students that potential employers have been keen to talk about their project work, and that it sets them apart from other candidates.

But the rationale for the Project goes further than this. It is also about your *personal development*, about realising the kind of person you are and the way in which you would like to live. To this extent, the Project has a broadly ethical aim – it concerns your self-formation, and contributes to making philosophy into a living, transformative practice.

Project Assessment

As in the case of your essays, your project dissertations will be examined by a primary marker (your supervisor), and then inspected by a second marker, both of whom will be internal to Philosophical Studies at Newcastle. Although project markers will not necessarily have expertise in your chosen object, their main focus is on the application of the ideas you have met on your modules as you use them to explore your chosen object. Your Project dissertation may be selected for scrutiny by the External Examiner who visits us (as the name suggests) from outside the university.

What are we looking for as assessors of your project dissertation? Your ability to marshal complex bodies of information with respect to your object, selecting relevant concerns; your intellectual ingenuity in using relevant philosophical ideas to explore the object in question; the originality and creativity of your approach, all of these are important. The criteria markers will apply to the projects are explicitly:

- Depth of understanding of philosophical concepts/thinkers
- Appropriate and creative use of philosophical concepts/thinkers
- Appropriate and reflective choice of methodology
- Rigour of ‘empirical’ research
- Evidence/relevance of secondary material (philosophy)
- Evidence/relevance of secondary material (object-centred/context)
- Awareness of personal development and level of personal engagement

- Structure, organ ation and style

Timetable

The timetable for project work is as follows. Project sessions start after reading week in Semester 1. By that time, you should have already thought of an appropriate object. Your project supervisor will guide you with respect to researching that object, and you will continue with this research throughout the Semester. Over the following weeks, you should also begin thinking about the philosophical ideas you want to use to explore your object. By the end of Semester 1, your project should have come into focus: you will have a clearly delimited object and a set of ideas appropriate to its exploration.

At the beginning of Semester 2, after the assessment period that follows the Christmas break, you will be asked to give a presentation on your project so far, as well as providing a short project summary (500 words – not included in your final word count) detailing your object and the ideas upon which you will draw in writing about it. You will now be able to write your Project dissertation. Later in Semester 2, you will be asked to give a second, final presentation of your work, before submitting your dissertation for marking. You will also be asked to give a one page summary of your project as a contribution to what we call the Book of Change – an online archive of our students' achievements and to hand in your Personal Development Plan (the 'workbook').

Project Structure

You will be guided by your project supervisor when it comes to structuring your 8,000 word dissertation. Generally speaking, you will have more freedom in doing so than in a conventional academic essay – for example, you can include illustrations, subchapters and appendices. It is important to include an opening chapter in which you specify both *what* you intend to do in your project, and *how* you are going to achieve it. We call the latter a *methodology*. It is important to show your assessors how you have organised material that pertains to your object and the ideas with which you mean to open it up to philosophical investigation.

Example

In our initial project group session just after reading week, John, a Stage 2 student is unsure what he wants to take as his object this year. I ask him about his interests, and what he intends to do when he leaves university. He's always been interested in football, he says – not just playing the game or supporting a particular team, but the way the sport has been shaped institutionally in the UK. John would like to get involved in sports in some way after university, but is not, at present, sure of how to achieve this.

I ask John to think about what aspects of football he might want to work on. The next time we meet, John tells me he's interested in the changes that have taken place in football in the UK in the last 25 years. He's been struck, he tells me, by an idea he has encountered in a lecture module - commodification, and thinks he might like to explore the ways in which football has been commodified in the time period in question.

Over the next few project group meetings, John and I discuss his project further. Gradually, John's object comes into focus. He begins to gather relevant materials from various media. In particular, John reads several issues of the Journal of Sport & Social Issues; searching on the internet, he finds a resource which focuses on Supporters Direct, an initiative by the government in 2000 with the aim of democratising football clubs. I also encourage him to read the journal Social Philosophy Today to look for relevant articles.

More broadly, John reads about the history of the idea of commodification, exploring Marx's notion of commodity fetishism. I encourage him to read Žižek's edited volume, *Mapping Ideology*, which provides him with a useful overview of Marxist thought, contextualising the ideas with which he wants to work. John finds the ideas of Jameson as they are excerpted in this volume particularly interesting, and I encourage him to read his *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. John finds the idea of postmodernism particularly interesting, and explores other, related books by Lyotard and Harvey. Other students in the project group are also reading these books, and are able to make some specific recommendations to John directing his reading further; he, in turn, suggests reading for them.

At the outset of the second semester, John makes a presentation on his project, and hands in a 500 word summary of what it is he intends to write. I direct John on his study, meeting with him in project groups and in one-to-one sessions, suggesting appropriate readings and helping him finesse his argument in his project. I also ask him to reflect on his Project methodology – on the way in which he intends to establish, as his thesis, that football has become more commodified in the UK.

At the deadline, John hands in an 8000 word dissertation entitled, 'The Beautiful Game? Football and Ideology in the UK 1980-2007'. I'm not an expert on UK football, but what I and the second marker look for is the way in which John has critically explored his object by drawing on particular works of philosophy and social theory. We award him 65%, being impressed at his wide but fine-grained reading, and the way he is able to draw confidently on Marxist and post-Marxist thought to make his argument. John's project dissertation, we note, has a clear section on methodology, and includes some interesting supporting material, including appendices which provide supporting statistics for his thesis.

John also hands in a one page document for the Book of Change which provides a short overview of his project dissertation detailing its aims, intentions and methodology. This is useful for John, as he can use that overview in application letters and on his CV to give potential employers or educators an account of what he has been working on at university.

I display John's Book of Change entry on the noticeboard for his fellow students to see. It serves as a useful pointer to other students as to what they might write about next year, and to visiting prospective students who are wondering what students at Newcastle University in Philosophical Studies get up to. We keep the Book of Change entry in an online archive, too, for the same reasons.

After graduation, John seeks a job in sports management, learning a further qualification would be useful, applies for a place on an MSc at another university. In his application letter for this place, John writes about his Project dissertation, showing the selection committee that he has already thought deeply about UK football as an institution during his undergraduate degree programme. John stresses in

these application letters the importance of active, independent, personalised learning on his degree programme. I am able to write a supportive reference for John confirming this.

Requirements

In order to complete the Project module, students will need to:

- In January,
  - Hand in a progress report (500 words)
  - Give a brief oral presentation
- In May,
  - Give a second oral presentation
  - Hand in an entry for the Book of Change
  - Hand in the Personal Development Plan (the 'workbook')
  - Hand in the final 8000 word project dissertation

Regulations

Failure to give the final presentation without a valid excuse will result in a loss of 10 marks from your overall project mark. Failure to submit the one page summary of the project for the Book of Change without a valid excuse will result in a loss of 5 marks from your overall project mark. Note that in Stages 2 and 3, the project is worth 40 credits in total.

Past Project Titles

The following project titles are taken from the work of previous students documented in the online archive, *The Book of Change*.

- The Contemporary Challenge: a philosophical investigation concerning the Heideggerian notion of dwelling
- The Discourse of Desire: Capitalism, Advertising and Human Relations
- The Office: A Philosophical Analysis of the Changing Conditions of Power and Resistance in the Corporate Workplace
- The Rise and Fall of the Self in Society: the Modern Identity Crisis in a Post-Modern Society

2| Glossary of useful terms

Here are a list of terms and buzzwords that your supervisor may use and will no doubt arise in your project meetings.

Active Learning – academic work that is more student-driven than usual, in which the learner actively shapes what it is he or she is learning, and the way in which he or she learns.

Book of Change – the online archive we keep of student abstracts outlining their project work, accessible at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/philosophicalstudies/.

Concepts – the philosophical concepts and ideas, drawn from the lecture courses, that the learner has chosen to apply to his or her object. It is often useful to relate them directly to relevant thinkers. So, looking at the object of 'woman' in the territory of 'the family', the concepts of 'property' and 'contract' in relation to Kant seem immediately salient.

Context -- the area or 'territory' within which you will explore the object of your project. So, for example, one may well look at the object of 'the woman' in the context of representational art, or within the context of the family, or in the context of biological sciences and so on. Each different context will provoke different questions and more than probably demand a different methodology and approach to the object.

Entry for the Book of Change – a small webpage summary of the student's project. We also display Book of Change entries on our noticeboards, to stimulate ideas and discussion. Such entries should state the objective/aim of the project (*what* it is intended to establish), the concepts to be utilised, as well as the methodology employed (*how* it is intended to be established).

Independent Learning – academic work in which the student, in consultation with his or her supervisor, has a larger role than usual in shaping his or her learning agenda.

Methodology – that section of the project dissertation that specifies *how* you intend to explore your chosen territory with philosophical concepts.

Object – the 'thing' which interests the student and to which he or she wishes to devote personal research. It can be as abstract as 'Love', as general as 'Music', 'Advertising' or 'Architecture' or as particular as 'Beethoven's Ode to Joy', 'Benetton shock advertising' or 'Manchester's Beetham Tower'.

Personal development plan ('workbook') – an archive of sources, collection of notes and a reflection on the learning process by the student him or herself. It can be as simple as a notebook or as complex as a student journal, but, typically, they would include quotations, printouts from the net, a growing bibliography, a statement of intent and reflections on methodology and learning outcomes. **The workbooks should be reviewed by supervisors in January along with the Project Progress Reports and also handed in with the final project dissertation.**

Personalised Learning – academic work that is tailored towards the uniqueness and individuality of each learner, rather than following a 'one size fits all' model.

Poster – an A3 visual presentation of a stage 1 project, its object and concepts.

Project – abbreviated description of the learning process best described as a personalised, object-centred research project and can often, colloquially and exclusively, refer to the project dissertation.

Project Dissertation – a 4000 word (stage 1) or an 8000 word (stages 2 and 3) essay, to be handed in on a set day during the assessment period of Semester 2. The dissertation, generally speaking, expresses more freedom in presentation style than a conventional academic essay; for example, the learner can include illustrations, subchapters and appendices when relevant. However, it must include an introduction explaining the student's original motivation and fully developed objective or aim as well as a section discussing methodology.

Project Group – a group of students who meet with their project supervisor regularly. This may comprise all the students who are supervised in a particular stage, or just some of them.

Project Presentation – a 5-10 minute talk on the learner's project and progress. Audio-visual aids (PowerPoint, overhead projection) are at the students' disposal and they can distribute photocopied handouts if they wish. They are also encouraged not to merely read out from a piece of paper. There are two presentations over the academic year: the first after teaching starts in January, and the second towards the end of the second semester in May prior to the university assessment period.

Project Progress Report – a short piece (500 words – not included in the final word count) summarizing research on the object so far and the philosophical ideas intended to be used to explore it.

Project Session – a meeting, be it 1-to-1 or in a larger group in which project studies are directed

Project Supervisor – the member of staff assigned to the student at the beginning of the year to direct his or her project.

Territory – see 'Context' above.

Workbook – colloquial term for the personal development plan.

3| Engaging with reality

Philosophy is a very academic and high level theoretical subject, but its concepts and methods are also useful when they engage with reality. So, for example, the ethicist can help the geneticist in directing his or her research and the aesthetician can aid the architect in designing homes. The purpose of your research Project is to demonstrate this to you through practice and ensure that you can justify this claim to others (say, future employers or friends and family). Through the choice of your object you have already engaged with reality, the question now is how you empirically explore it.

This phase of your research is above all about the collection of evidence either through empirical observation or data analysis and that evidence is the foundation of your reflection and thinking. Your object exists in spatial and temporal coordinates and within the ideas of people, and this existence has evidence which can be expressed in empirical terms. Encounter your object in its place and time in order to understand it best.

Step 1| Object in context (or 'territory')

First, the object and the context you are exploring will determine to a large extent the sources and material of your research. If your context is broadly historical, then there are archives and documents. If it is broadly ethical, then governmental legislation is a useful place to look. But don't stick to simple library sources. Engage reality head on through photographs, images, sounds, video clips, statistics and published surveys. Ask people (friends, acquaintances, etc.) about their attitudes or their recollections. Information should be collected, written up in and reflected upon in your personal development plan.

Step 2| Simple empirical research

Proper research ought to start when you have used the information from step 1 to formulate some concrete ideas about your object. Devise a list of questions about your object and think through how you would answer them. You should find that thinking about your object will often be grounded in specific assumptions that you unreflectively possess (call these 'cultural *a priori* folk theories' if you wish) and these assumptions need to be tested. As such, these assumptions and questions need to be transformed into a hypothesis or claim. For example:

- Legislation prohibiting certain substances is justified by protecting the individual;

Now, this claim needs to be tested. Given the above claim, we suppose that the government will legislate against similarly harmful practices and substances. So, our evidence consists of other practices and substances (rock climbing, alcohol) and seeing if they are legislated against and if not why are they different. You may also want to revise your initial hypothesis as the evidence builds up. You must be able to state the relationship between your claim and the evidence for and against it.

Step 3| Types of empirical research

Second, choose which type of information collection method you think is appropriate. Here's a list of empirical research methods:

1. observation (perception, images, film);

2. archival (documents, historical statistics);
3. interpretative (narratives, representations);
4. quantitative (statistics, economic values, measurement, timing);
5. qualitative (attitudes, assumptions, opinions).

Which one(s) is most appropriate to you object and its context? How would you pursue it?

Step 4| Creative research

Third, by answering the following questions you may hit on novel and innovative ways to look at your object and to collect evidence about it.

How do you think you might best research the place and themes of your project (for example taking pictures, interviewing people, communicating with agencies, teachers, etc, searching in the library or on the web, looking up technical details and meaning of, say, history, science, etc of what you are assembling)?
Can you relate the subject matter of your project to the knowledge you possess in general and the knowledge you have acquired from experience, curricula outside Philosophical Studies and also other sources of knowledge communication?
Do you need to learn any specialist skills or acquire any discipline specific knowledge via an optional module or consultation in another department, e.g. economics, computer programming, social policy, sustainable development etc? What are they? If not, why?

4| Critical reflection, change and contrast

By now you should have chosen your object and have made a provisional decision about the context or territory you are going to place it in. So, it might be the object of education in a particular school or in the University; or it might be education in an historical context. It could be woman in representational art; or women in the context of the family. It could be football in St James' Park or football in the media. And so on. Your engagement with the reality of your object (that is, your empirical research) will have furnished you with much information and many stories about your object and you will now have a comprehensive understanding of your object.

However, it is time to ask reflectively whether your immediate understanding of the object is reliable and trustworthy. And that means also imaginatively understanding your object in a different way: *as if* you were an alien, or *as if* you were from a radically different culture, or *as if* you were from a different historical epoch, or *as if* within a different context or territory. Think of this as a little thought experiment. Would your understanding of the object be different? This is the process of reflection. Now, ask yourself why would you understand the object differently? This ought to disclose some assumptions you unreflectively hold about the object and take to be true which perhaps need to be questioned. These assumptions are very often a very good guide to which philosophical concepts you will need to investigate.

An example

A learner looks at the object of woman within the context of the family and, through empirical research, develops a claim that women are more likely to occupy a specific role in the family and sacrifice their careers than men. He is puzzled by this since he has always assumed that women and men are treated equally in our society and assumes that if this were so it would be a more equal distribution of roles between genders.

His supervisor asks him why he supposes that claim to be the case, especially if the evidence seems to deny it. The student is encouraged to look into two contrasts: one, an historical one and look at the role of women in Ancient Greek society and also a cultural one and women in other societies. He seeks relevant sources and information in order to understand the object of women in the context of these different cultures and eras.

Once he has the research in front of him, the learner is ready to question his own assumptions. By an imaginative leap the learner realises he would not question why woman aren't treated equally to men when – in this imaginative state – he realises that they are different in kind. So, for him, women and men have equal worth, but for other cultures they do not. The question, then, is whose understanding of the object is better or true? And his supervisor tells him in order to understand that he needs to look at the concepts of either equality and/or essence; or the philosophical concept of the family and/or order.

The learner has formed a guiding question of his research, 'Are the genders equal?', and the question requires he looks first at the philosophical concept of equality.

5| Self-assessment of the research project's progress

It is time to make concrete the exact orientation and nature of your project research and that means stating its components in a very succinct manner. The following pages ought to help you to identify clearly your object of research, how you are going to think about it and also begin to make you think why you are pursuing it. Complete the questionnaire and bring it to the next project group meeting where you will discuss it with your supervisor.

Overview

By now you should be able to:

1. identify your object;
2. state what context the object 'belongs' to;
3. list sources of empirical evidence and information;
4. state the philosophical concepts and thinkers you intend to use;
5. contrast two different understandings of the object within your chosen context.

Progress questionnaire

Name:	
Date:	
Part 1: Knowledge generation	
What is the object of your study? In what context (or territory) is the object to be interrogated? (For example, I may want to study the human body as an object, but I can do so in a context of art or historical medical anatomy.)	
What or where is the 'reality' (the place or source of visual and other concrete material/data for your work; a book, newspaper, a building, an epoch, etc.) you have decided to research? What is the 'reality' you wish to investigate?	
Identify a contrast or comparison of the understanding of your object within the context of study. The contrast can be theoretical, cultural, historical or social.	

Write down at least five statements that capture the essence of what your research is about in the order of interest to you. Divide them into philosophical concepts and non-philosophical terms.
Can you think of a unifying theme for or a connection between these terms and your object-context?
Which modules from the Philosophical Studies programme and which thinkers are most useful in the exploration of these ideas?
Can you now think of a provisional title for your project research?
Part 2: reflections on your own interest
Of the knowledge you are acquiring, what are you finding most interesting and would like to research in greater depth?

Which tasks are you enjoying most and which would you like to pursue further if you could?
Can you identify a work place (employment niche) where you could do one or the other (or even both) of these things?
Part 3: Bibliography
List below the main texts, documents and media that you believe will constitute the theoretical material of your project.

6| Choosing an appropriate methodology (stage 3)

Introduction

You are now in a position to offer a collection of knowledge statements about a particular object by applying certain philosophical concepts to the understanding of that object. Let us say that you are looking at the activity of shopping in the context of culture and contrasting the historical phenomena of the market and the mall through the prism of the concepts of consumerism and need. A methodology will help you to shift from a mere description of the object and context to a reflective analysis of object and how the philosophical concepts allow us to overcome distortions in our immediate understanding of it. So, we might see shopping as leisure, but see that it developed out of human need so it is perhaps better understood as labour and a burden. You have empirical evidence that supports this claim (numbers of hours spent shopping, qualitative analysis of shoppers' attitudes, and so on).

The methodology of your project brings together the philosophical concepts, their application, the contrast and the empirical statements you have collected into a rational whole. You are offering a rational evaluation, explanation or description of your object and you need to justify it. So, you need to say a little about how you do this.

Remember that methodology is implicit to the knowledge statements you have produced and merely needs to be made explicit. When the curator of a museum uses a casual explanation of individuals' behaviour to explain the position of facilities ('Let's place the café at the exit, people will be thirstier.'), or an historical contrastive method ('By placing the items as they would have been originally in the Pompeian homes rather than how we expect them to be in a museum, we see them in their 'natural' light.'), they are already using a method to justify their statements, actions and policies. So, the curator would say that his statement is true because he can prove people are thirstier at the exit by observation (methodology: naïve inductivism) or, for the second statement, it is true because the authentic presentation of thing is the best way to experience them (methodology: interpretative).

Choosing a method

The choice of method ought to be directly related to two aspects of the object under consideration: first, the nature of the object; and, second, the empirical part of the research and the sources of information about the object. Both of these aspects are heavily related to the identification of the *territory* or context in which the object is situated. The territory or context (its 'place' in the broadest sense of that word) of the object directs the learner to include certain sources of information and exclude or ignore others as well as determining the way in which the object is understood.

You have already been introduced to a variety of methods throughout the course of your degree programme and b applying philosophical concepts to a part of reality (your object), you will be making claims about it that answer one of these questions:

- How did this happen?
- Is this right or good?

- What does it mean?
- What causes/caused it to be like this?

And, for each of these questions, we can distil a very general methodological approach:

Most normal/usual territory/context	**Stage 1**	**Stage 2**	**Stage 3**	**Key question**
	IMMEDIATE	REFLECTIVE	CRITICAL	
CULTURE, SOCIETY, HISTORY	Contrastive method	Historical method	Genealogy	How did this happen/come about?
ETHICS, POLITICS, LAW	Intuitionism/ foundationalism	Reflective equilibrium	Axiological critique	Is this right/good?
ART, LITERATURE, BEHAVIOUR	Interpretative methodology	Theories of difference	Hermeneutics	What does it mean?
TECHNOLOGY, SCIENCE	Naïve inductivism	Hypothetico-deductive method	Paradigmatic relativism	What causes it to be like this?

There is no presumption that these are context bound methodologies and any given methodology can successfully be applied to other territories. Neither should it be assumed that each dissertation should adopt only one methodology, but they must adopt at least one. There are many more methods and you could combine two or more of the above to your object, but you should be able to state the relationship between the object, context and contrast and the method with which you are using. You will need to discuss this with your supervisor in depth and be clear exactly how you are using your concepts.

Assessment

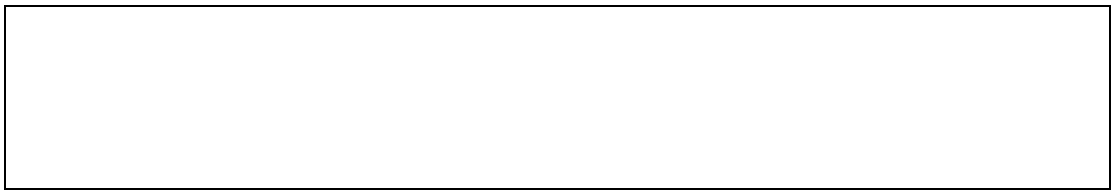
What are we looking for in your discussion of methodology? In stage 1, learners were expected to describe the method they used. In stage 2, we required a description of the method(s) as well as a justification for the choice of that method. Now, in stage 3, we expect a description, a justification and an evaluation of the appropriateness of the method, that is how good/successful a choice it was in aiding your application of the concepts to the object.

7| Self-assessment of personal development

Why are you engaging in this research? What are you learning and which skills are you acquiring?

Name:	
Date:	
Think of examples of where you had to apply the skills listed below:	
To formulate a problem/task or tackle unfamiliar subject material in order to be able to proceed.	
To select from a large amount of possible sources, data, concepts (for example cultural styles or trends, regional variations, etc) and separate concepts from stories and other general contexts (place, presentation in media, book not directly related to your aims, etc)	
To organise/order data or texts and present your findings clearly and articulately	
To bring to conclusion (summarise, highlight, itemise) a significant portion of your work	
To compare, evaluate and prioritise critically your sources/judgements and to see them as part of a 'knowledge system' (physics, phenomenology, positivism, socialism…)	

To learn how to improve your computer presentation via IT tricks, web downloads, etc.
To think of how to present a piece of work to others and to develop skills necessary for communication
Is your confidence in these skills improving or not? If not, how might it be improved?
Why might someone be interested in reading your project (other than yourself and your supervisor)? What would you most like to tell other people about your research?
Describe in a couple of sentences what you want to achieve (beyond a good mark) from the project. Are these achievements measured by an increase in knowledge or the acquisition of skills?



8| Project Objectives and Titles

In order to clarify the direction and structure of your projects and also to prepare you for the production of the Book of Change entry, you should now be in a position to explain the project objectives. These are your aims and intentions and are best understood as a way to justify what you are doing: if you had to justify what you are writing about to your friends or family, how would you do it? Why should anyone other than your supervisor and yourself be interested in the subject matter of your project?

Do not think this is a pointless task. It should, at this point of your research, enable you to fix the motivations, ambitions and direction of your project and allow you to decide what is relevant and what is not. It should also allow you to choose your provisional title.

Main objective

The main objective describes the motivation and intuition that define your project, both why it is important to you and why it should be important to others. This will in most cases be your starting claim, what guides your investigation and why you are investigating it at all. (Note it is this claim you will probably make in your introduction and it is to this claim that you shall return in your conclusion.)

Intended knowledge outcomes

These describe what you expect to learn through the engagement with your object, both the philosophical and other knowledge you expect to acquire.

Intended skill outcomes

You also ought to start to reflect on what you might say if you were asked in an interview how your degree was useful in preparing you for this or that career. These skill outcomes will feature in the personal reflection on your project and also the goals you set yourself.

Example

Object:	the family unit
Context:	the family as a **historically** changing object
Concepts:	autonomy, property, rights
Thinkers/texts:	Locke, Kant, Hegel, Deleuze
Change/contrast:	historical contrast between the extended pastoral family (pre-1700s) and the industrial nuclear family unit (post-industrial revolution) in relation to the idea of the family in postmodern society
Method:	interpretation of representations of the family in historical documents.

Main objective:

The project is driven by the intuition that our normal understanding of the family as a small, nuclear unit is an historical phenomenon that rests upon the metaphysical commitment to

private property and the free market and that such a commitment results in undesirable obligations and omissions that are dependent on this worldview.

Intended knowledge outcomes:

By engaging in this project, I intend to:

1. learn about the historical origins of the nuclear family unit;
2. be acquainted with the standard descriptions of the family unit and the justifications of the family bond;
3. be able to define the central concepts of autonomy and property;
4. demonstrate the connection between metaphysical theories and everyday understandings of a phenomenon (here, the family).

Intended skill outcomes:

Through the project work, I intend to:

1. Develop the ability to marshal large amounts of data, to process it and to decide what is relevant to the matter at hand.
2. Develop critical and analytical skills in the interpretation of a wide variety of material.
3. Acquire the ability to independently orientate myself in alien and extra-curricular sources of information.
4. Learn to apply theoretical concepts and considerations to empirical phenomena in order to generate significant knowledge.

Title

The above considerations should enable you to formulate a provisional title (although you will still be able to change it if you wish). So, for the above example, we would probably offer:

Title: **Exchanging vows: family relationships and possessions**

Remember that your title is designed with two criteria in mind: (1) to describe what your project dissertation discusses in a succinct way; and (2) to draw attention to your project dissertation and entry in the Book of Change.

Please fill in the next page and bring it to the next project meeting for discussion with your supervisor.

Project Objectives and Provisional title

NAME:	
OBJECT:	
TERRITORY:	
CONCEPTS:	
THINKERS/TEXTS:	
CHANGE/CONTRAST:	
METHOD:	

Main objective:

Intended knowledge outcomes
BY ENGAGING IN THIS PROJECT, I INTEND TO:

Intended skill outcomes
THROUGH THE PROJECT WORK, I INTEND TO:

Provisional Title

9| The structure of your project dissertation

You will be guided by your project supervisor when it comes to structuring your 8,000 word dissertation. Generally speaking, you will have more freedom in doing so than in a conventional academic essay – for example, you can include illustrations, subchapters and appendices. There is no set template for the dissertation and you ought to let your own intellectual instincts guide your presentation and structure, but you should include (in some form or another) discussions of or sections devoted to:

1. specifying *what* you intend to do and achieve in your project as well as *why* you are going to do it (**objectives**);
2. setting out *how* you are going to achieve what you intend to do (**methodology**);
3. presenting the philosophical concepts (**theory**);
4. demonstrating their appropriateness and worth of these concepts in relation to your object (**application**);
5. evaluating what you have achieved and the value of your research (**conclusion**).

Please note: there is no requirement that you follow the order of the sections nor that each section is explicitly titled. Remember that you are to define for yourselves the best way to report and present the findings of your research. Discuss with your supervisor the best way to do this.

Project Assessment

As in the case of your essays, your project dissertations will be examined by a primary marker and then inspected by a second marker, both of whom will be internal to Philosophical Studies at Newcastle. Although project markers will not necessarily have expertise in your chosen territory, their main focus is on the application of the ideas you have met on your modules as you use them to explore your chosen territory. Your Project dissertation may be selected for scrutiny by the External Examiner who visits us (as the name suggests) from outside the university.

What are we looking for as assessors of your project dissertation? Your ability to marshal complex bodies of information with respect to your territory, selecting relevant concerns; your intellectual ingenuity in using relevant philosophical ideas to explore the territory in question; the originality and creativity of your approach: all of these are important. The criteria we shall apply to the projects are explicitly:

- Depth of understanding of philosophical concepts/thinkers
- Appropriate and creative use of philosophical concepts/thinkers
- Appropriate and reflective choice of methodology
- Rigour of 'empirical' research
- Evidence/relevance of secondary material (philosophy)
- Evidence/relevance of secondary material (object-centred/context)
- Awareness of personal development and level of personal engagement
- Structure, organisation and style

10| The final presentation

It is a requirement of the Project module that you present your work orally. Failure to do so will result in a penalty of 10 marks. The project group will be invited to ask questions and you should be prepared to respond articulately and interestingly. In a job interview, you will more than likely be asked: 'Was your degree programme useful or relevant for this job?' and these presentations are excellent preparation for this practice.

You will be guided by your project supervisor about what is expected in your final presentations, but here are some pointers.

- Presentations ought to be between 5 and 7 minutes long. Time yourself in a mirror.
- You only have time to explain the basics: state what your object of study is, how and why you are looking at it, and why the philosophical concepts you are using are appropriate.
- Do **not** just read out from a prepared script – structure your talk around five or six bullet points.
- You are free to use PowerPoint, the whiteboard or handouts. Don't put too much information on these, though and remember they are just 'background' to your talk. Think about creative ways and styles to make your point. (You may wish to use your entry for the Book of Change or a slightly expanded version of it as the foundation for your presentation.)
- Be confident: remember you always know more than your audience – you are the expert on your project!

Appendix C| Module Outline Forms

Stage 1

Aims

This module acts as an interface between knowledge systems and philosophical ideas students have encountered in Stage 1 modules and contemporary culture, allowing them to try out and critically engage with ideas as they are brought into contact with an empirically defined 'territory'.

Summary

This is an object based context driven study designed to promote deeper understanding of the conceptual material covered by the course and be instrumental in developing a personal portfolio of knowledge and skills linked to a specific place or work environment.

Outline of syllabus

- To discuss key knowledge systems introduced in lectures and to develop project methodology at Stage 1 level
- To discuss Project methodology as it links empirical and conceptual material
- To explore the key notion of a territory (an object or place characterised by diverse material exchanges) as it is suitable for exploration through the application of philosophical ideas and knowledge systems.
- To become acquainted with testing an abstract vocabulary in an empirically defined context.

Intended knowledge outcomes

Students will

- become acquainted with Project methodology as it links empirical and conceptual material;
- become acquainted with a chosen territory (an object or place characterised by diverse material exchanges) as it is suitable for exploration through the application of philosophical ideas and knowledge systems;
- become acquainted with testing an abstract vocabulary in an empirically defined context.

Intended skill outcomes

Students will

- critically engage with philosophical ideas and knowledge systems as they are brought into contact with an empirically defined object or place;
- learn how to process knowledge, organising a diverse body of material such that it becomes amenable to philosophical analysis;
- learn to share the results of their research with other students through the giving of presentations.

Other

Empirical data collection, organisation and management

Rationale and relationship to learning outcomes:

This module acts as an interface between the key knowledge systems and philosophical systems of thought ideas students have encountered in Stage 1 modules and contemporary culture. Tutorials and individual interviews provide students with a systematic account of Project methodology as it links empirical and conceptual material. General study skills and presentation skills are to be taught.

Stage 2

Aims

This module acts as an interface between knowledge systems and philosophical ideas students have encountered in Stage 2 modules and contemporary culture, allowing them to try out and critically engage with ideas as they are brought into contact with an empirically defined 'territory'.

Summary

In the project module students develop the ability to see their subject specific conceptual knowledge projected on material exchanges, on an object or place where such ideas are actualised and where the abstract vocabulary is tested in empirically defined contexts. This process develops their learning power in terms of transferable competences of cultural and technological orientation, of knowledge processing, creativity and sharing. It is a natural way of establishing a pragmatic personal portfolio of skills matching the personal ability and interests and a recognisable niche in the workplace.

Outline of syllabus

- To discuss key knowledge systems introduced in lectures and to develop project methodology at Stage 2 level
- To develop a way of seeing knowledge as a relation between humans and things reaching beyond anthropocentric attitudes
- To place learning practices in the context of information society
- To develop a portfolio of evaluative, orientation and communication skills relevant for operating knowledge networks

Intended knowledge outcomes

Students will:

- develop a good understanding of Project methodology as it links empirical and conceptual material;
- develop an empirical understanding of a chosen territory (an object or place characterised by diverse material exchanges) as it is suitable for exploration through the application of philosophical ideas and knowledge systems;
- develop a good understanding of the challenges of testing an abstract vocabulary in an empirically defined context.

Intended skill outcomes

Students will:

- critically engage with philosophical ideas and knowledge systems as they are brought into contact with an empirically defined object or place;
- learn how to process knowledge, organising a diverse body of material such that it becomes amenable to philosophical analysis;
- learn to share the results of their research with other students through the giving of presentations.

Other

Rationale and relationship to learning outcomes

This module acts as an interface between the key knowledge systems and philosophical systems of thought ideas students have encountered in Stage 2 modules and contemporary culture. Seminars and tutorials provide students with a systematic account of Project methodology as it links empirical and conceptual material.

Stage 3

Aims

This module acts as an interface between knowledge systems and philosophical ideas students have encountered in Stage 3 modules and contemporary culture, allowing them to try out and critically engage with ideas as they are brought into contact with an empirically defined 'territory'.

Summary

This is an object based context driven study designed to promote deeper understanding of the conceptual material covered by the course and be instrumental in developing a personal portfolio of knowledge and skills linked to a specific place or work environment.

Outline of syllabus

- To discuss key knowledge systems introduced in lectures and to develop project methodology at Stage 3 level
- To develop a way of seeing knowledge as a relation between humans and things reaching beyond anthropocentric attitudes $
- To place learning practices in the context of information society
- To develop a portfolio of evaluative, orientational and communicational skills relevant for operating knowledge networks

Intended knowledge outcomes

Students will:

- develop an advanced understanding of Project methodology as it links empirical and conceptual material;

- develop an advanced empirical understanding of a chosen territory (an object or place characterised by diverse material exchanges) as it is suitable for exploration through the application of philosophical ideas and knowledge systems;
- develop an advanced understanding of what it means to test an abstract vocabulary in an empirically defined context.

Intended skill outcomes

Students will

- develop an advanced ability to critically engage with philosophical ideas and knowledge systems as they are brought into contact with an empirically defined object or place;
- develop an advanced ability to process knowledge, organising a diverse body of material such that it becomes amenable to philosophical analysis;
- develop an advanced ability to share the results of their research with other students through the giving of presentations.

Other

Knowledge domains and communication methods linked to a place or work domain

Rationale and relationship to learning outcomes

This module acts as an interface between the key knowledge systems and philosophical systems of thought ideas students have encountered in Stage 3 modules and contemporary culture. Seminars and tutorials provide students with a systematic account of Project methodology as it links empirical and conceptual material. General study skills and presentation skills are to be taught.

Appendix D| Faculty assessment criteria

The descriptive equivalents are intended as a guideline only and criteria will not apply equally to all pieces of assessed work. The Faculty expects that examiners will use the whole of the marking scale and to interpret these criteria in the context of the specific aims and objectives of the module or piece of assessed work. Where deemed appropriate, other marking criteria may be used and in such cases they should be made available to students in advance of the assignment. It is important to ensure that comments made on assessed work can justify the final mark awarded based on these descriptors and clear explanations for any deviations should be given

Class Equivalent	Mark Range	Descriptive Equivalent
First Class	90-100	Excellent. An outstanding piece of work throughout with excellent analysis, synthesis and evaluation of material and concise, logical thought. Where appropriate, work shows originality and critical ability. Demonstrates comprehensive understanding of topic with evidence of substantial additional study and with virtually no errors. Extremely well presented and structured work. Could not be bettered at this Stage in the time available.
	80-89	Excellent. Outstanding in most elements but minor deficiencies in some, compensated by excellence in others. Extremely well presented and structured work.
	70-79	Excellent. Work overall excellent with respect to synthesis, originality, critical ability and logical argument. Thorough understanding of the topic and evidence of significant additional study, although may contain minor errors. Extremely well presented and structured work.
Upper Second Class	65-69	Very good. Shows thorough understanding of topic. Substantial detail supported by reasoned argument, application and critical analysis, with evidence of further study. Very well presented and structured work.
	60-64	Very good. Work provides substantial information that addresses the aims and objectives of the module/topic. May contain minor errors of understanding. Some evidence of additional study. Very well presented and structured work.

Lower Second Class	55-59	Good. Work indicates understanding of the topic, largely factually correct, but lacking in critical analysis and in evidence of further study. May contain significant errors of understanding compensated by very good work in other areas. Well presented and structured.
	50-54	Good. Work that is relevant to the module/topic aims and objectives but not a full treatment. Relies almost entirely on course material and may contain significant errors of understanding and some errors of fact. Generally well presented and adequately structured.
Third Class	45-49	Basic. Limited but acceptable understanding of material. Omission of much relevant material and/or use of irrelevant material. May contain significant errors of understanding and fact. Adequately structured and presented.
	40-44	Basic. Barely acceptable with limited grasp of material. Significant omissions, errors of understanding and factual errors. Generally poorly presented and structured.
Fail Compensation Range	35-39	Borderline fail. Demonstrates minimum acceptable understanding in some though not all areas. Many factual errors and omissions. Generally poorly presented and structured.
Fail	30-34	Fail. Some material of relevance, but generally irrelevant approach and failure to understand basic requirements of module/topic. Significant factual errors and omissions. Little or no structure and poorly presented.
	16-29	Fail. Limited work showing an inability to deal with the requirements of the module/topic. Some factually relevant material.
		Fail. Extremely limited work with very little factually relevant material.
	6-15	Fail. Little or no attempt to complete the work.
	0-5	

Appendix E| Empirical data